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UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE

CASSIUS M. CLAY'S TRUE AMERICAN

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty

Of the Graduate School of the University of Louisville

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Of Masters of Arts (or Science)

Department of History

By

ALBERT D. KIRWAN

Year

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Chapter II.	Rise of Anti-Slavery.
Chapter III.	Publication of <u>True American</u> .
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I. Introduction

Kentucky slavery was attacked during the summer months of 1845 from within by one of the state's native sons. Cassius M. Clay, son of a Madison County slaveholder, began the publication of The True American, an abolition paper, on June 3, of that year. He caught the tide of slavery controversy in one of its numerous periods of flux. At that time opinion on the slavery question was not solidified anywhere in the country. Since 1831 most of the opposition to the "peculiar institution" was centered in the states north of the Mason-Dixon Line, but even in that vast region, there was no unanimity of opinion on the solution for the problem which was presented by the alternative of continued slavery, or of gradual emancipation.

Probably, at that date, a majority of people in the North were disposed to look upon slavery as at least a moral evil, but at that point their paths divided in many directions on the question of what should be done about it. There were some who felt that slavery was an evil, but that it was a local problem to be settled by the respective states, with the Federal Government placing no impediments in its path.

The beliefs of these men, however, were mild indeed, as compared with those of a small but vociferous group known as the American Anti-Slavery Society.

This group, led by the brilliant but fanatical William Lloyd Garrison, advocated immediate and compulsory emancipation of all slaves everywhere in the United States, by civil law if possible, but by violence if necessary. Some of this group believed that compensation should be paid to the masters of the emancipated blacks, but the more radical of them, like Garrison, would not make even this concession. The activities of this group did much to cement opinions in the slave states in defense of their institution and to make abortive any attempt from within the stronghold of slavery to bring about emancipation.

In between these general groupings could be inserted various shades of differing emancipation programs. But it is well to bear in mind that in the middle 1840's, most of those, who were the leaders of anti-slavery though in the North, were far apart from one another in the program which each advanced for the elimination of the great evil. Just as most of the anti-slavery sentiment was centered in the North, so the strongest advocates and defenders of slavery were found in the South. And again here, just as in the North, many different beliefs existed as to the extent the South should go in defense of its system.

But due to the controlling influence which the great slave owners exerted over the media of public

expression in the South, it was more difficult in that section for those opposed to the "peculiar institution" to find adequate channels for expounding their opposition; although there is abundant evidence that such opposition did exist, especially when it became apparent that the course they were pursuing would lead to a dissolution of the Union.

Following the Nat Turner¹ insurrection in Virginia and the subsequent deluge of Abolitionist literature that descended on the South from the North, most of the Southern legislatures passed laws making it a felony to print or speak matter of an incendiary nature regarding slavery. Any discussion of the legality of the property right of the master was particularly condemned. Laws also were passed forbidding the teaching of Negroes to read or write.²

¹In 1831, Nat Turner, a trusted Negro slave in Virginia, led a revolt of slaves which for weeks terrorized several entire counties in Virginia. More than a score of whites were murdered by the rioting Negroes before the revolt was finally suppressed with the aid of Federal troops. The Southerners generally attributed this slave uprising to the influence of Abolitionist literature.

²Eaton, Clement, Freedom of Thought in the Old South, 126-129. Ibid., 114-119. Negroes could not be taught to read and write save in Maryland, Tennessee, and Kentucky. Writing of Abolitionists had great influence in driving Southerners from the poise necessary to deal with the Negro problem with an open mind. Many of the slaves could read the emotional propaganda of the Abolitionists. Denmark Veazey and Nat Turner were influenced by the written page.

In one respect the Southern people were highly intolerant at all times, in their attitude toward "foreign emissaries" and toward the insulting publications of the North. It was precisely against the activities of this type of person that the Southern laws were passed and enforced, rather than to suppress the discussion of free Southern men.³ The surprising fact about Southern laws curtailing freedom of discussion is that they were so rarely invoked. For considerable periods they were allowed to become dead letter laws and were revived only in time of passion, as during the violent excitement of 1835-1836. Otherwise, persons of Southern birth might express anti-slavery opinions with impunity. The courts, also, when called, into action, tended to moderate the harshness of the written code, and to throw the mantle of protection around minorities.⁴

But newspaper controversies did not often come up for adjudication in court. The feeling prevailed in most Southern communities that it was cowardly and unmanly to resort to the courts to sue a man for slander or insult; "so over the head of the outspoken editor hung the sword of Damocles, the code duello."⁵

³Ibid., 143.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., 163.

The practice of duelling therefore constituted a threat to the freedom of the press in the old South. There was an astonishing mortality among Southern editors.⁶

The Legislature of Kentucky was a notable exception to the stern laws of the other border states. Kentucky had no legislation prohibiting the teaching of Negroes to read or write, nor until 1860, did she have any laws infringing the freedom of the press or of speech. The mildness of Kentucky's laws may explain the prevalence of so much mob violence there in the decade from 1850-1860.

It was in the border states of Delaware, Maryland, Kentucky, and Missouri where the difference of opinion was most marked and where the opponents and defenders of slavery met on perhaps more equal terms than they did in either the North or the deep South.

Because the scope of this study must necessarily be confined to the geographical limits of Kentucky it would perhaps be well to glance for a moment at the domestic scene in that state.

Kentucky as the first of the western states, had naturally in the early nineteenth century occupied a position of predominance both in political leadership

⁶ Ibid.

and in agricultural and industrial production.

Turnpike construction and improvement of waterways had occupied much attention in Kentucky in the 1820's and 1830's. By 1840 almost nine hundred miles of roads had been converted into graded and McAdamized highways over which "every class of carriages of burden and of pleasure pass with ease and convenience at all times",⁷ and almost four hundred miles of streams had been made navigable. Most of this undertaking had been promoted by the state and at the expense of the taxpayers. In 1829 the Louisville and Portland Canal was opened. Ten years later, in 1839 the bonded indebtedness of the state on account of internal improvements was \$1,765,000. Nor was there any lessening in this activity in the next few decades, for in 1860 the bonded indebtedness had reached the figure of \$4,500,000.⁸

The state was also interested in railroads. The only one in the state, the Lexington and Ohio, did not render adequate service. Although the state had not taken stock in the road, it had assumed a surety to the road of \$150,000, and in 1842, on the failure of the road to meet its obligation, it came into the

⁷ Connelly, W. E. and Coulter, E. M., History of Kentucky, 728.

⁸ Ibid.

hands of the state.⁹

Apparently these great enterprises were carried on without partisan dissent, for "there never was a solitary Internal Improvement Bill passed by the Kentucky Legislature on which the members divided according to their designations as national politicians. The bills were supported and opposed by both the parties [Whigs and Democrats] without reference to national politics."¹⁰

Manufacturing, so prominent in the domestic affairs of Kentucky in the early days of statehood, was replaced by an intense agricultural interest. It was thought by many that this was due to the blighting effect of slavery. Others attributed it to the low tariff and to the influence of the railroads,¹¹ bringing in European and Eastern manufactures. Good land in Kentucky was conducive to certain types of agriculture, and manufacturing was subordinated to agriculture. There was an emphasis on expansion westward.¹²

In 1820 there were 110,777 people engaged in industry, while 132,060 were engaged in agriculture. In 1842 only 23,217 were engaged in industry, while

⁹ Ibid., 736.

¹⁰ The Frankfort Commonwealth, September 5, 1843.

¹¹ Connolly, W. E., and Coulter, E. M., Op. Cit., 739.

¹² Ibid.

the number who earned their livelihood in agriculture had grown to 197,738.¹³ The chief agricultural crops were hemp and tobacco, and of these two tobacco was the most valuable crop and stood first in the interests of the people.¹⁴ In 1840 Kentucky led all the states in the production of hemp and was second in the production of tobacco.¹⁵ Because of the importance of hemp in Kentucky's economy, she was committed to the tariff policy of Henry Clay.¹⁶

Education in Kentucky was relatively more backward in 1840 than in 1830. In the former year there were only 32,920 children reported in school - scarcely 1000

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Coleman, Mrs. Chapman, Life of John J. Crittenden.
"Clay to Crittenden, June 3, 1842", p. 180.

"Most of our hempen manufactures are ruined or threatened with ruin. This is owing to the introduction of India and other foreign stuffs used in bagging. Our people say that they cannot do with less than five cents the square yard upon bagging. When the tariff gets to the Senate you and your colleague are expected to take care of this single Kentucky manufacture."

The Frankfort Commonwealth, July 1, 1845.

Discussing free trade vs. the tariff: "We go for the laborer. We want to see him employed at good wages, and employed upon the resources of our own country . . . we want to see labor regarded as honorable . . . and the laborer respected . . . equal . . . to the highest in the land . . . Let a fraction talk about nullification, resistance of the government, and war to prevent protective laws! The true point to fight about, if there must be fighting . . . is for protection [tariff]."

In another article of the same issue, The Commonwealth showed that products such as potatoes and wheat, which had a 30% tariff, were actually imported into the United States in 1844. "The reduction of wages is what the Freetraders of this country are endeavoring to effect."

more than were attending schools in 1830, despite the fact that the school population had increased more than 40,000 in the decade. In 1840 there were 42,000 persons over twenty years of age in the state who were unable to read. Some counties were still without a single school. In Floyd County, with 2,055 children of school age, and in Clay County, with 1,080, not one was in school, while Ohio and Knox Counties had a little better record with 25 out of 1,714 in school in the former, and 46 out of 2,566 in the latter. The most progressive counties could not maintain half of their children in school.¹⁷

There was no hostility of any consequence anywhere against common schools - the trouble was the Legislature and others in authority were following the line of least resistance. While they believed that common schools were a good thing for the state, they did not believe it with sufficient strength to prevent them from sacrificing school funds for other activities they deemed of greater importance. In 1847 the Legislature referred to the school system as "deficient in its character and imbecile for want of pecuniary

¹⁷ Connolly, W. E. and Coulter, E. M., Op. Cit., 764-765.

means to carry it into practical operation."¹⁸

By far the most important issue before the people of Kentucky during the decade of the 40's was the question of slavery. This institution affected either directly or indirectly the development of the state along every line; "It obtruded itself, either secretly or openly, into almost every question of the day."¹⁹ It had its usual effects on social classes, but the "poor whites" were not so hopeless or so numerous as in the states further south.²⁰ Despite the tenacity with which Kentucky clung to slavery, that institution was comparatively dying out in the state. Most Kentuckians would have liked to be rid of the blight, but they were opposed to having free Negroes. The institution was intrenched in the Federal Constitution and it permeated the state's legal constitutional development. Thus it was that, while slavery was tending to die as a practical institution, it grew as a political and constitutional issue which welded the people in to a strong majority for its continuation.²¹

¹⁸ Ibid., 765-767.

¹⁹ Ibid., 796.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 819-820.

As has already been indicated, many people in the state were opposed to slavery in varying degrees. Perhaps a majority of them would at any time have welcomed a miraculous metamorphosis of the state with slavery and all its effects left out. But the freeing of the slave would not remove the Negro. Emancipation would bring up a problem of even greater moment - this was the problem of what to do with the freedmen. This problem many thought could only be solved by removal²² but removal was impracticable.

While Kentucky seethed beneath the surface, and sometimes above, on the question of slavery, other events of less moment, attracted public attention during the year 1845. Gas lighting was coming into prominence, the wireless telegraph was spreading its network into the state, and Asa Whitney was stirring the imagination of many with his "visionary" scheme of constructing a trans-continental railway. In the summer of 1844 the demented Dr. Abner Baker had killed his brother-in-law, Daniel Bates. Relatives and many others, including eminent doctors, jurists, the Commonwealth's attorney who secured his conviction, and even the trial jury which rendered the verdict of guilty pled with Governor Owsley for a pardon for Baker on the grounds of insanity, which Baker had refused to plead. But the Governor

²² Ibid.

refused all pleas for clemency and Baker went to his doom on the gallows on October 3, 1845.²³ The ashes of Daniel Boone and his wife had been disinterred from Missouri and brought to Kentucky and laid to final rest in Frankfort, scarcely a fortnight before.²⁴ It was an age of barbecues, and political rallies, and "speakings". The barbecues not only served to draw great throngs of people together to feast on choice viands and oratory, but they served as an occasion where the political leaders of the party throughout the nation could be invited to be present. Not that it was believed that they could be present, but the replies of regrets, in which occasion was always taken to extol the party and its lofty principles, formed valuable propaganda.

Beneath this exterior, however, the fires of hatred were being fed on the slavery issue, and these were to grow and to increase in intensity until the general conflagration was to break out, almost devouring the Union, and bringing Kentucky face to face with her greatest crisis.

²³Robertson, George, Scrapbook, 282-317.

²⁴The Frankfort Commonwealth, September 14, 1845.

II. The Rise of the Anti-Slavery Movement in
Kentucky.

By 1845 Kentucky attitudes toward slavery were of varying shades, yet there was a fairly clear demarcation between the pro-slavery and anti-slavery forces. This cleavage was of long standing, and its existence was magnified by the fermentation of state and national developments of the turbulent decades of the thirties and forties. Certainly the argument over slavery in Kentucky ante-dated the formation of the state itself. The issue was brought squarely before the earlier Separation Conventions, and in May, 1792, it was placed squarely before the First Constitutional Convention. So powerful was the influence of the pro-slavery forces that the ninth article of the constitution guaranteed the institution its existence. It was only after considerable discussion that the article was adopted. While it was designed to make the institution as mild and humane as possible, it nevertheless made it virtually perpetual, unless there should be a change in the fundamental law.²⁵ The Legislature was denied power to pass laws for the emancipation of the slaves without the consent of their owners. Nor could it prevent owners from bringing their slaves into the state. On the other hand, the General Assembly was given extensive powers in respect

²⁵ Martin, Asa E., The Anti-Slavery Movement in Kentucky, 14.

to the importation of slaves into the state as merchandise.²⁶

In the convention David Rice, a clergyman from Boyle County, contended that the constitution should declare against slavery as a matter of principle, - leaving it to the Legislature to find the most suitable means of abolishing it. Emancipation by some means he regarded as a political necessity. "The slavery of the Negroes began in iniquity; a curse has attended it and a curse will follow it. National vices will be punished with national calamities."²⁷ How prophetic these lines must have read in the dark decades that followed 1860.

After the ninth article was adopted a motion was made by Mr. Taylor, of Mercer County, and seconded by Mr. Smith, of Bourbon, to expunge it, "which was negatived and the yeas and nays on the question were ordered to be entered in the Journal."²⁸ The result of the vote was: yeas, 16; nays, 26. The new state had stood at the parting of the way, and the way that was chosen was destined to lead it to the unhappy fate so ably foretold by David Rice.

Considerable interest was exhibited in the elections

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Martin, Asa E., Op. Cit., 15.

²⁸ Ibid., 16.

of 1797 and 1798 in regard to calling the constitutional convention of 1799. Slavery would be one of the subjects dealt with in that convention, and alarm was felt by many slaveholders that immediate, uncompensated emancipation might ensue. In a letter to Governor Isaac Shelby on March 11, 1798, John Breckinridge wrote: "If they [emancipationists] can by one experiment emancipate our slaves, the same principle pursued will enable them at a second experiment to extinguish our land titles; both are bought by rights equally sound."²⁹

In a pamphlet of April 25, 1798, addressed to the "Electors of Fayette County", Henry Clay discussed the importance of the slavery issue in the coming convention. He urged that the convention should at least remove the constitutional restriction so that the legislature could deal with the problem at any time that it saw fit.

"All America acknowledges the existence of slavery to be an evil which ... in the end injures the master too, by laying waste his lands, enabling him to live indolently, and thus contracting all the vices generated by a state of idleness."³⁰

The Convention of 1799 did not change the slavery provisions of the Constitution of 1792, but Henry Clay and Robert J. Breckinridge, a Presbyterian clergyman of Fayette County, both stated subsequently, that the

²⁹ Ibid., 26-27.

³⁰ Ibid., 28

vote on those provisions was close.³¹

Defeat in the Convention of 1799 was not considered final by the anti-slavery forces in Kentucky. Almost every year bills were proposed in the legislature calling for new conventions, where the battle could be renewed. Also, bills intended to encourage voluntary emancipation, to ameliorate the condition of the slaves, and to secure the enactment of more rigid importation laws were repeatedly introduced.³²

These repeated attempts to pass bills calling constitutional conventions resulted in constant uneasiness on the part of slaveholders, who knew that such a convention would be called primarily to change the status of slavery. Robert Wickliffe, familiarly called the "Old Duke", the largest slaveholder in Fayette County and one of the largest in the entire state, led the fight of the radical slave holders against a convention. He argued that such action by Kentucky would only result in slave owners moving their property to the deep South, thus depriving Kentucky of great wealth, and also injuring Kentucky slaves, since the harshness of their toil in the

³¹ Ibid., 32.

³² Ibid., 33.

torrid climate of that section was notorious.³³

The slave holders did not wish to see the power to emancipate placed in the hands of the legislature, since that body might at any time pass into the control of the radical anti-slavery party and abolish slavery without even compensating the masters.³⁴

On the other hand many slaveholders advocated the calling of a convention because they believed in providing for gradual emancipation, while some anti-slavery people like Robert Breckinridge, opposed a convention on the ground that the legislature actually had the power under the Constitution of 1799 to gradually eliminate slavery either with the consent of the owners or without consent provided the owners were compensated.³⁵

³³ Connolly, W. E., and Coutler, E. M., Op. Cit., 800.
"In 1828 a petition came up to the legislature from Hopkins County praying that body that something be done toward the cause of emancipation. In its answer the legislature admitted that slavery was an evil that all wished to be rid of ..."
Also, Martin, Asa E., Op. Cit., 98, 99.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Eaton, Clement, Freedom of Thought in the Old South, 178.

The Flemingsburg Kentuckian and The Paris Citizen published a letter from a Bourbon County slaveholder, urging that the proposed constitutional convention should follow the example of New York and Pennsylvania and adopt a system of gradual emancipation followed by the colonization of freed Negroes. The editor of the Kentuckian wrote editorials in favor of gradual emancipation and admitted both pro and anti-slavery articles to his columns, for he wished "to see the subject fully and fairly discussed and presented to our readers in as impartial a light as possible." Also, Martin, Asa E. Op. Cit., 100-103.

In 1831 William Lloyd Garrison began the publication of The Liberator in Boston and two years later the American Anti-Slavery Society, which until then had been working for gradual emancipation, began advocating immediate emancipation.

After the appearance of organized abolitionism in Kentucky a reaction toward pro-slavery set in. Substantial progress toward emancipation which had been made in the early 30's was lost.

The movement was revived, however, by James G. Birney. Birney, a native Kentuckian had moved in his youth to Alabama, where he had become a wealthy slave holder. He had been interested in colonization, and in 1832 had become the agent for the American Colonization Society in Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Tennessee. While engaged in his colonization activities he became interested in all phases of slavery. In 1833, convinced of the futility of colonization, he quit, moved to Kentucky, and started working directly for emancipation.³⁶ In 1833 he issued a call for a convention of slaveholders to meet and pledge emancipation. Only nine showed up at the convention and the following year the organization dissolved. Henry Clay refused to support the call.

³⁶

Martin, Asa E., Op. Cit., 69-72

Shortly after this Birney succeeded in bringing Kentucky directly into the Abolition movement by organizing the Kentucky Abolition Society.³⁷ After the failure of his gradual emancipation convention in 1833 Birney had become convinced that immediate abolition was the only solution for the slavery question. His new organization was launched with forty charter members, none of whom were slaveholders. This organization presented a brand of slavery opposition which was new to Kentuckians: Emancipation, immediate and complete, by fair means or foul. This had the direct effect of killing at one blow the various emancipation organizations in the state, for the great body of Kentuckians were not yet willing to try so desperate a remedy as immediate emancipation.³⁸

In the spring of 1835 Birney announced his intention of publishing an Abolitionist paper in Danville, Kentucky. The first issue of this paper, The Philanthropist, was scheduled to make its appearance in August. Birney was approached first by friends who advised against his venture. When it was apparent that he could not be dissuaded, a citizens mass meeting was held in Danville as a protest, and Birney was warned

³⁷ Connally, W. E. and Coulter, E. M., Op. Cit., 801.

³⁸ Ibid., also Martin, Asa E., Op. Cit., 73, 75.

that dire consequences would result if he should go through with his plan. When Birney still was adamant a committee of slaveholders bought out his printer and threatened Birney with personal violence. Convinced at last that popular sentiment would not support him, Birney moved to Cincinnati where he began publishing The Philanthropist in the winter of 1835-1836. His departure marked the disappearance of the Kentucky Anti-Slavery Society.³⁹

Despite Birney's misadventure sentiment for emancipation was so strong, and the question was so greatly agitated, that many slaveholders opposed to emancipation favored a convention to settle the issue one way or another. If they were to give the opposition more time to gather strength, it appeared that their cause would be hopeless. Other slaveholders felt that the time was ripe for a convention because the work of the Abolitionists had alienated many of the anti-slavery forces.⁴⁰ In 1837 the legislature passed a convention bill by a vote of twenty to sixteen in the Senate, and fifty-seven to forty-two in the House.⁴¹

The Constitution of Kentucky provided that when

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Eaton, Clement, Op. Cit., 178.

⁴¹ Ibid.

a majority of members elected to each house should concur in passing a law, specifying alterations intended to be made, elections were to be held, and if a majority of voters voted for the convention the General Assembly was to direct that a similar poll should be taken at the general election the following year. If a majority again voted for a convention, the General Assembly was to issue a call for and order an election of delegates to a convention.⁴² Thus, in order to effect emancipation anti-slavery forces had to command a majority of votes in the elections of 1838 and 1839 and also secure the election of a majority of delegates to the convention in 1840.⁴³ Nevertheless, the anti-slavery forces in Kentucky and throughout the country were sanguine, and the pro-slavery forces were deeply concerned. Much attention throughout the country was centered on Kentucky. If she should emancipate it would probably influence other border states and break the balance of slave and free states in the Union. By April of 1838 the emancipationists seemed to regard the struggle as won.⁴⁴

The American Anti-Slavery Society, a national organization dedicated to the abolition of slavery took

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 103

⁴⁴ Ibid., 104-105.

an active part in the campaign and sent much anti-slavery literature into the state. This caused a great reaction even among those Kentuckians who opposed slavery, and Henry Clay, James Morehead, Robert Breckinridge, and others, spent most of their energies in denouncing the Abolitionists.⁴⁵

In the election of 1838 the calling of a convention was defeated by a ratio of four to one, and responsibility for the defeat was laid to the work of the Abolitionists, and the fear their radical doctrines bred in Kentuckians. There was stronger opposition to all anti-slavery activities in the state after this, and Henry Clay said that emancipation had been set back half a century.⁴⁶

The white heat of the pro-slavery forces cooled after the 1838 election and the anti-slavery advocates resumed their emancipation work. Anti-abolitionist sentiment, while still present, began to subside. But such an ardent anti-slavery advocate as Cassius M. Clay in 1840 classed the Abolitionists as equally evil with the pro-slavery radicals.⁴⁷

Since 1815 there had been a considerable trade in slaves between Kentucky and the states of the deep South. Robert Wickliffe, in 1840 in a speech to the

⁴⁵ Ibid., 88-90.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 109-110.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 111-112.

Kentucky legislature, estimated the number sold as 60,000 since 1833.⁴⁸ This aspect of slavery was very objectionable even to slaveholders, and slave traders were held in scorn and were, indeed, social pariahs. Congress was repeatedly petitioned to prohibit this domestic slave trade, but it was thought to be without the constitutional power to do so. Power to enact such a prohibition was held by the individual states, and laws of this type were passed, at one time or another, by several slave states. The Kentucky Constitution of 1799 instructed the legislature to prohibit the importation of slaves brought in from a foreign country after 1789. Acts were passed in 1799 and again in 1815, attempting to do this, but they were not enforced.⁴⁹

From the late 1820's anti-slavery workers in Kentucky directed their efforts toward influencing opinion in favor of prohibiting the importation of slaves into the state. In 1827 Franklin Lodge No. 28, a Masonic group at Danville, circularized Kentucky Masons, stating that importation was contrary to feelings of benevolence and philanthropy and calling upon all Masons to work for a law prohibiting such

⁴⁸ Ibid., 88-90

⁴⁹ Ibid.

importation. The circular disclaimed all intentions of interfering with slavery as an institution.⁵⁰ A series of letters by Robert Breckinridge, John Green, and George Clark discussing every phase of slavery appeared in the newspapers in the same year. But the pro-slavery forces were too strong at that time and popular reaction forced Breckinridge to resign his seat in the legislature as a result.⁵¹ A bill was not proposed in that session.

In 1830 a bill to restrict importation of slaves was proposed in the Legislature but was defeated in the House by a tie vote. Niles Weekly Register in an editorial of February 6, 1830, approved of the bill. Similar bills passed the House in 1831 and 1832 but were defeated in the Senate. Finally, in February, 1833, a bill passed both Houses, was signed by the Governor and became law. It was not designed to prevent immigrants to the state from bringing their slaves, nor to prohibit the entry of slaves acquired by marriage or inheritance, but was merely designed to prevent importation of slaves as merchandise. The bill provided a fine of \$600 for each offense. It was to be enforced by the County Attorneys who had to take an

⁵⁰ Ibid., 90-92

⁵¹ Ibid.

oath to do so, and who were to be compensated by a payment of twenty percent of all fines.

The law seemed to produce the desired effect, for by 1840 the percentage of slaves in Kentucky was slightly decreasing; and before that date a strong movement, led by Robert Wickliffe, had been launched to repeal the bill. After 1836 a repeal bill came before the legislature annually, which frequently passed the Senate, but was always defeated in the House. In the legislative election in 1840 candidates were frequently required to commit themselves on this issue. In 1840 and 1841 a newspaper and pamphlet war was engaged in between Robert Wickliffe on one side, and Robert Breckinridge, Thomas Marshall, and Cassius M. Clay on the other, on the issue of the Law of 1833.⁵² Wickliffe urged the slaveholders of the South to hold a convention to formulate plans to protect their interests against the rising tide of emancipation.

In 1845 a determined drive was made on the Law of 1833 by the pro-slavery forces. The campaign to elect their representatives was energetically pursued by both parties. George Robertson, a professor of Law at Transylvania University, and one of the foremost jurists and political thinkers in the state, spoke

⁵²

Ibid., 95.

often and learnedly in behalf of retaining the law. He had always felt that slavery was a curse to the white race, but as it then existed in Kentucky, it was "not within the compass of human wisdom, philanthropy, and power all combined, to adopt any system of compulsive liberation" which would be "practicable, just, safe, and sure." Immediate emancipation "would be madness, and ... any organized effort to initiate a prospective scheme, would be premature, unwise, and self-destructive."⁵³

Robertson thought non-importation was necessary to a solution of the slavery question. "Undisturbed by accessions from abroad, slavery here, ... will soon decline to a condition in which its extinction may be accomplished without hazard."⁵⁴ In the twelve years that the law had been in effect the number of slaves in Kentucky had actually decreased by approximately 6,000. Also the Law of 1833 had been the chief agency in bringing great wealth to the state, in the form of increased real estate values, and increased

⁵³Robertson, George, Op. Cit., 332. "Emancipation now is utterly hopeless - public sentiment is not prepared for it - and if it were otherwise, no permanent, just, and practicable scheme could be devised until the numbers of slaves can be considerably diminished - and this can be accomplished only by non-importation and voluntary exportation. If this generation, or its successor, be destined to see the day of universal freedom in Kentucky, the dawn of that day will have been preceded by non-importation and voluntary exportation."

⁵⁴Ibid., 327.

industrial output.⁵⁵ He thought also that the law placed Kentucky in a desirable position of neutrality between the radical Wilmot proviso-ism of the North and the ultra-conservatism of the pro-slavery South.⁵⁶ Furthermore, "The passage of this [repeal] bill would reduce the value of the slaves now here - diminish the value of slave labor - reduce wages - injure the useful class of free mechanics - agitate the people and perhaps convulse the state ... and might impair the just influence of the Commonwealth, and jeopardize her own peace, the security of the South, and the integrity of the Union."⁵⁷

If the bill should be passed Robertson thought the thousands of intelligent Kentuckians who were willing to make a fair trial of the issue of slavery, would construe the passage as a pro-slavery move, designed to perpetuate slavery by "immediately augmenting the number of slaves to such an extent ... and render the prospect of emancipation hopeless in this

⁵⁵ Ibid., 321. "As long as that law was reasonably observed, the prosperity of the state increased in an unexampled ratio. In seven years immediately succeeding the enactment of it, the aggregate wealth of Kentucky rose from \$126,000,000 to \$240,000,000."

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 325.

generation."⁵⁸ He feared that throughout the state the controlling question in selecting delegates to the convention would be their stand on the slavery question, without regard to their fitness or opinions on other fundamental questions. Consequently there would be danger that "a bad constitution would be proposed, which ought not to be adopted."⁵⁹

In response to these and other pleas a legislature was chosen, which refused to repeal the Law of 1833.⁶⁰

During the period from 1837-1840 the progress toward emancipation, gradual or immediate, lost ground. A reaction was setting in. The activities of Northern Abolitionists did harm to the cause of gradual emancipation in Kentucky.⁶¹ In the face of the onset of outside meddling, the opinion of the state tended to unite in solid opposition against interference with slavery in any way. Many who theretofore joined heartily in the movement for gradual emancipation either became lukewarm or deserted it altogether. Henry Clay, who had always been the friend of emancipation, was ill-

⁵⁸ Ibid., 327.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ The Frankfort Commonwealth, January 15, 1845.

⁶¹ Coulter and Connelly, Op. Cit., 801-802.

pleased at the meddling of outside Abolitionists. A movement for a constitutional convention in which the friends of emancipation were expecting to redeem the state from slavery had gained some headway, but disastrous failure in the election of 1838, as has already been mentioned, resulted.⁶²

The Legislature in a set of resolutions in 1836 resented the officiousness of the Northern Abolition societies. From that time on, opposition of a bitter kind was constantly the result of the abolition missionaries' attempt to convert Kentucky. Kentucky was developing more and more common interest with the rest of the slave-holding states and her leadership was coming to be identified with the leadership of the South. The Missouri Compromise had played an important part in the development of Kentucky feeling on the subject of slavery. Kentucky objected to the "subversion of the Constitution by imposing conditions on one state not required of others."⁶³ Even the emancipationist Robertson thought "every free people ought to regulate their own policy, and especially their own domestic relations."⁶⁴

The ire of the emancipationist Whig paper The

⁶² Ibid., 803.

⁶³ Ibid., 804.

⁶⁴ Robertson, George. Op. Cit., 336.

Frankfort Commonwealth was aroused by the activities and propaganda of the Abolitionists from the North. In an editorial in the issue of September 5, 1843, it complained of the hostility of the Abolitionist press to the presidential candidacy of the Commonwealth's idol, Henry Clay.

It seems to be a rule with them [Abolitionists] to oppose a man the worse the nearer he stands to them. We have done all we ever mean to do toward averting their insane hostility, and we close with repeating the expression of our deliberate conviction that the Whig Party will not think of giving up its decided choice for President to propitiate them."

In a still more belligerent note it went on:

If a statesman so generous as Mr. Clay, so warm hearted in the cause of Human Freedom himself ... an open opponent of slavery and an effective enemy of gag-laws and all infringements on the Public Liberty in behalf of slavery, is to be prescribed on Abolition grounds, there is an end to the compromise of the Constitution - there must be an end very soon to the Union."⁶⁵

Another cause of resentment was Northern assistance to runaway slaves. Almost with the beginning of the nineteenth century slaves were making their escape across the Ohio, and the difficulties surrounding attempts to recover them were growing and becoming more exasperating. To assist a slave to escape was in direct violation of a law of Congress, which, however, was enforced with little or no diligence by the anti-slavery state officials in the Northern states. On the other hand activities of slave hunters north of the Ohio

⁶⁵ The Frankfort Commonwealth, Sept. 5, 1843.

River developed too often into kidnapping expeditions.⁶⁶ In 1839, responding to a plea of a commission from the Kentucky Legislature, the Ohio Legislature passed a law punishing those who abducted slaves, or who aided in their abduction or escape. Notwithstanding this the number of slaves who escaped or were carried away by the "underground railroad" increased by leaps and bounds. About 1841 a well knit, systematic organization, with its agents and stations had sprung up to entice and aid slaves to freedom. The losses to Kentucky in runaway slaves was said to be \$200,000 annually.⁶⁷

As has been mentioned before, many people in the state were in varying degrees opposed to slavery. Perhaps a majority of them at any time would have welcomed a change with slavery and all its effects left out. But the freeing of the slave would not remove the Negroes. To foster their removal the Kentucky

⁶⁶ Coulter and Connelly, Op. Cit., 804-805.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 806. Eaton, Clement, Op. Cit., 113. "The Underground Railroad was a safety valve for the slavery system. As soon as leaders arose among the slaves refusing to endure the yoke they went North. Had they remained the vengeful breath of massacre would have swept the South."

Colonization Society was formed in 1829 as an adjunct of the American Colonization Society. The movement soon was bearing some fruit, but never did an appreciable number of freedmen go to Liberia, the haven in Africa obtained by the Society wherein to colonize the Negroes.

Nearly every anti-slavery society had a special committee to look after the interests of the free Negroes, to see that their rights were not abused, and to raise their standards of morality. It was with a view to finding a solution to this problem that the American Colonization Society had been founded in Washington in 1816.⁶⁸ The objects of the society were: "The removal to the coast of Africa, with their own consent, of such people of color within the United States as are already free, and of such others, as the humanity of the individuals, and the laws of the different states, may hereafter liberate."⁶⁹

The Society disclaimed any intention of interfering with the institution of slavery. It met with most support in the border states. In spite of its innocuous protestations, it was regarded with some suspicion in the deep South as a scheme leading to eventual emancipation. On the other hand the American Convention of Delegates for the Promotion of the

⁶⁸ Martin, Asa E., Op. Cit., 40-50.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 51.

Abolition of Slavery and Improving the Condition of the African Race withheld all support on the ground that the society was doing nothing to further the ends that the Convention had in view. Bushrod Washington, John Marshall, James Madison, James Monroe, and Henry Clay had all served as presidents of the Society.⁷⁰

In 1821, acting upon the urging of the Society, Congress purchased Liberia on the west coast of Africa and set it up as a colonial area for the freed Negroes. The Society drew many adherents for many different reasons. Some pro-slavery men supported it because it would rid the state of undesirable free Negroes. Some anti-slavery men joined because they saw an aid in the eventual extinction of slavery.⁷¹

Abolition societies generally adopted colonization as one of their objects in 1823 and gradually gave it increasing prominence, until many of them had become in the late 20's, in reality colonization societies. Churches also lent their support to the movement, and in 1823 the Presbyterian Synod of Kentucky approved the work of the American Colonization Society and appointed a committee to further its objects in the state. Kentucky newspapers took up the scheme and devoted

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., 52.

increasing attention to it.⁷²

In 1827 the General Assembly of Kentucky passed a resolution endorsing colonization. Two years later the Kentucky delegation in Congress was asked to use its influence to secure an appropriation from Congress to further the interests of the Society. By 1829 there were five local societies in Kentucky which were affiliated with the national organization. They united in that year and became the Kentucky auxiliary of the American Colonization Society.

In Kentucky the anti-slavery feature of the colonization scheme became active. The local societies were the center of anti-slavery thought. Robert Breckinridge, in 1831, said colonization took for granted the fact that slavery was a great moral and political evil and the Society "cherished the hope and the belief, that the successful prosecution of its objects would offer powerful motives and exert a persuasive influence in favor of emancipation."⁷³ Henry Clay regarded slavery as "an evil antagonistic to the economic interests of the state,"⁷⁴ and believed colonization "would contribute to its extinction."⁷⁵ But as was

⁷²Ibid., 53. The governing bodies of the Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian churches of Kentucky repeatedly approved and aided colonization.

⁷³Ibid., 54.

⁷⁴Ibid., 55.

⁷⁵Ibid., 56.

to be expected, these sentiments provoked a reaction, and Robert Wickliffe severed his connection with the society when he learned it was interested in emancipation.⁷⁶

Despite the calibre of leadership which it attracted, and the zeal with which they worked, the Kentucky Colonization Society never was able to accomplish much in colonizing or in reducing the number of slaves. Their collections of funds for carrying out their program amounted to only \$1,137.67, in 1833, and three years later they were hard pressed to turn over \$1,000 to the national organization.⁷⁷ The cost of transportation of one Negro to Liberia was estimated at from twenty to thirty-five dollars. Also each colonist had to be supported for six months after his arrival there. Each adult colonist was promised a building lot in the town of Monrovia with five acres adjoining. If however, they would agree to settle two miles from the city they were to get fifty acres; if three miles they would get one hundred acres.⁷⁸ One vessel sailed in 1846 from New Orleans, among whose passengers were thirty-five Kentucky Negroes. The same year the Presbyterian Synod of Kentucky pledged \$500 toward buying a packet to run between New Orleans

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Ibid., 57-60.

⁷⁸Ibid.

and Liberia.⁷⁹

When the Negroes failed to receive with open arms this opportunity for a new life in Liberia, attempts were made to compel all free Negroes in Kentucky to colonize, but these were never acted on by the Legislature. In 1838 Senator Underwood, one of the larger slaveholders in Kentucky, suggested to the United States Senate a plan of gradual emancipation and colonization, but this was never acted upon.

While colonization accomplished very little in Kentucky, it nevertheless kept the vision of emancipation constantly before the people. In 1840, according to the Commonwealth there were 7,317 free Negroes in Kentucky, and an editorial urged aid toward colonizing them. "Here they never can rise from their status of inferiority to the whites. Wisdom and benevolence require some action to prepare in time a good and suitable home for them on the coast of Africa."⁸⁰ On June 10, 1845, the True American carried a notice of an attempt of the Colonization Society to raise \$5,000 in Kentucky for the purpose of purchasing a tract in Liberia to be known as Kentucky in Liberia, and to be settled by emigrants from Kentucky. A vessel was to be chartered to take such emigrants in

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ The Frankfort Commonwealth, January 30, 1845.

November, 1845, "if a sufficient number will engage to go."⁸¹ In November, 1848, the Commonwealth noted that the American Colonization Society was in need of funds. It required \$50 to pay the transportation and to support for six months in Liberia, each emigrant. Four hundred and forty-three had been sent in the preceding year. There were applications from ninety-five more in Baltimore, and four-hundred and seventy-two in New Orleans, but insufficient funds prevented their accommodation. Thirty thousand and five hundred dollars had been collected in the first ten months of the year, while \$50,000 was needed. The Commonwealth urged the individuals in each state to assume the financial responsibility for its freedmen.⁸²

But in spite of all their pleas, the efforts of the Society bore little fruit. The whole colonization movement throughout the entire country is said to have removed in nineteen years the equivalent of the actual increase by birth of only nine and one-half days.⁸³

It may seem strange that Kentucky, being so near a dangerous abolition center, Ohio, did not have stringent laws against incendiary publications.

⁸¹ True American, June 10, 1845.

⁸² The Frankfort Commonwealth, November 17, 1848.

⁸³ Connelly and Coulter, Op. Cit., 799.

Several reasons contribute to this anomaly. The presence of remarkable leaders like Henry Clay and Cassius M. Clay, who threw the weight of their magnetic personalities on the side of liberalism; the influence of the neighboring free soil states; and the relatively small proportion of slaves in Kentucky. They constituted about one-fifth of the population in 1850.⁸⁴

The reaction against Abolition also found expression through the religious organization of the state. The Baptists, the Presbyterians, and the Methodists, the leading denominations in the state, took considerable part in the slavery controversy before 1850. Yet they were affected by reaction and split into Northern and Southern factions.

After 1830 some anti-slavery activity continued in local Methodist Churches or Conferences in Kentucky, but by 1840 it had disappeared. From 1837 to 1844, when the General Conference split into the Northern and Southern Conferences, no important action was taken by the annual conferences in Kentucky. The Kentucky delegates in the General Conference almost always supported the Southern point of view, while endeavoring to reestablish harmony. In 1845 the annual Kentucky Conference threw in its lot with the Methodist Episcopal Church South, which had been formed the preceding year.

⁸⁴

Eaton, Clement, Op. Cit., 114-119

From 1845 to 1860 the Kentucky Conference remained unchanged in regard to slavery, although individuals in the church worked for emancipation.⁸⁵

In 1835 the Northern Baptist Association declared, "The practice of holding men in slavery ... a violation of the natural rights of man and contrary to the first principles of the gospel."⁸⁶ The Kentucky Banner [Baptist] condemned this statement. The Kentucky Association of Baptists had refused to be drawn into the controversy since the early years of the century, and used its influence to prevent individual churches from doing so. In 1844 and 1845 the North-east, and Northwest Baptists refused to cooperate with the Southern churches in insisting on the right to send out slaveholding missionaries. As a result of this stand the Southern Baptist Churches split off and formed their own church. In 1845 the Kentucky Baptists identified themselves with the Southern branch.⁸⁷

The Presbyterian Church in Kentucky attracted a smaller proportion of slaves than did the Methodist and Baptist, but nevertheless they continued their emancipation work through the 1800's with great zeal. In 1831 the West Lexington Presbytery urged masters to

⁸⁵ Martin, Asa E., Op. Cit., 81.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 82.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

teach slaves to read and to give them Bibles. About this time, too, the Lexington Presbyterians established a school for Negroes. In 1833 Robert Breckinridge walked out of the Kentucky Synod when it refused to adopt a resolution encouraging emancipation. However, the synod subsequently passed a resolution saying that slavery was repugnant to the principles of religion and that "the continuation of the system longer than is necessary to prepare itself for its safe beneficial termination is sinful."⁸⁸

The Synod of 1833 appointed a committee to prepare a plan for instruction and future emancipation of slaves. This was largely due to the influence of James G. Birney. In 1835 this committee published a plan in a sixty-four page document, ably written by President J. C. Young, of Centre College in Danville. The plan was a strong endorsement of gradual emancipation. The report was never acted upon by the Synod of Kentucky. Perhaps it was too far in advance of public sentiment in the slave states.⁸⁹

In 1836 the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in its annual meeting at Pittsburg decided that slavery was a political question and refused to take any action that might divide the church. The anti-abolition

⁸⁸ Ibid., 83-84.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 85-86.

campaign during the 1830's quieted the churches, but it lost its force in the next decade. Thereupon the churches again took up the question of colonization and education of slaves, and encouraged voluntary emancipation. In 1845 the Synod of Kentucky adopted a resolution in favor of educating the slaves of the state. The Presbyterian Herald approved of the resolution but urged no further agitation.⁹⁰

The Presbyterian Church as an organization refused to be drawn into the controversy after 1846, but members of the church were leaders in the campaign of 1848-1849 for constitutional abolition of slavery. In the emancipation convention of 1849, thirteen of one hundred and fifty delegates were Presbyterian ministers.⁹¹

There was much fear and insinuation and talk of disunion, during this period, but it must not be thought that there was much sentiment in Kentucky in the 1840's for a dissolution of the Union. Her great leaders, Clay, Crittenden, Dixon, Owsley and others were too strong and too devoted to the Union to permit such a sentiment to gain considerable strength. In an address on July 4, 1843, George Robertson doubtless expressed a sentiment that the overwhelming majority of his fellow citizens held with him. "Must we not as

⁹⁰ Ibid., 87.

⁹¹ Ibid.

hitherto resolutely maintain the Union of the States,
and as indispensable to that end, the supremacy of
national authority over national affairs? Will
Kentucky ever be guilty of the suicidal act of
rupturing the vital Siamese artery which unites the
twenty-six states as one in blood and destiny? One
and all Kentuckians answer no ----- NEVER!"⁹²

⁹²Robertson, George, Op. Cit., 279.

III. Publication of the True American.

With the foregoing material as a background, we are in a better position to understand the conflicting beliefs and interests that were swirling and eddying in Kentucky during the middle 1840's when Cassius M. Clay launched his emancipationist newspaper, The True American, in Lexington. But before going into our study of that it is necessary for us to glance briefly at the background, education, and early career of that scion of an aristocratic, slave-holding family, in order to understand by what process he became a leading actor in one of the greatest dramas which the slavery controversy was to produce in Kentucky before the War Between the States.

Cassius Marcellus Clay was born in Madison County on October 10, 1810, the youngest son of Green Clay, who was the largest slaveholder in that county. He was educated in his boyhood by Joshua Fry, of Garrard County and later of Boyle County, to whom young Cassius was sent as a private pupil. He was then sent to the Jesuit College of St. Joseph in Nelson County. In 1829 he enrolled in Transylvania University in Lexington, where for two years he pursued the study of law. In 1831 he transferred to Yale, where he was admitted to the Junior Class and was graduated two years later with a degree in law. While a student

in New Haven he attended a lecture on slavery by William Lloyd Garrison, which was to affect greatly his future career. Under the influence of Garrison he became thoroughly steeped in the doctrines of Abolitionism. To him, slavery seemed not only a great moral and religious wrong but a most flagrant violation of human rights. After one of Garrison's lectures he wrote: "I felt all the horrors of slavery; but my parents were slaveholders; all my known kindred in Kentucky were slaveholders; and I regarded it, as I did other evils of humanity, as the fixed law of nature or of God ... Garrison dragged out the monster ... and left him stabbed to the vitals, and dying at the feet of every logical and honest mind ... I then resolved that when I had the strength, if ever, I would give slavery a death struggle."⁹³

Upon leaving Yale, Cassius Clay returned to Kentucky, became active in politics, and outspoken in his views on slavery, as on other questions. His was a dangerous course, but the one quality which he possessed above all others was courage, both physical and moral. He flaunted his emancipationist doctrines in the very faces of the slavocracy, and soon became their most dangerous adversary, as well as their most hated. In

⁹³ Clay, Cassius M., Memoirs, 56-57.

1841 during the agitation on the bill to repeal the Non-Importation Law of 1833, Clay denounced slavery and its defenders with savage and vitriolic language. Threats of violence by slave owners failed to lessen his enthusiasm for his cause or to temper the savagery of his language.

C. M. Clay was first chosen to the Legislature of Kentucky in 1835 from Madison County, but was defeated for reelection because of a question on internal improvements. In 1837 he was once more elected, and in 1840, having moved to Fayette County, he was elected from there. In 1841 he was again a candidate for the Legislature, but by this time he had made himself obnoxious to the slave power, and was defeated through their influence.

He opposed young Robert Wickliffe, son of the "Old Duke" for a seat in the legislature, and an altercation between them led to a challenge by Clay and its acceptance by Wickliffe. In the early dawn of May 15, 1841, the duel was fought near Louisville. Pistols were used and both adversaries missed at ten paces. The seconds then arranged that the affair be called off, but no apology was made and, as Clay said, "we left the ground enemies, as we came."⁹⁴

In the race for Congress in 1843, young Robert Wickliffe was a candidate, and Cassius Clay stumped

⁹⁴Ibid., 80-81.

the Bluegrass for his opponent, Garrett Davis. The Wickliffes had imported from New Orleans Samuel M. Brown, a strong slavery advocate and a man of powerful physique. Brown was a bully who had the reputation of having engaged in forty fights without a loss. Soon after his arrival in Lexington a large political rally was held at Russell Cave Springs in Fayette County. As young Robert Wickliffe addressed the crowd, Cassius Clay challenged one of his statements, whereupon Clay was set upon by Brown and felled with a blow.

Clay regained his feet, drew a bowie-knife from his shirt, and rushed on his assailant. Brown, armed with a pistol, held his fire until Clay was within a few feet of him, and then fired point-blank. But Clay came on, and with fierce thrusts of the bowie, "laid his skull open to the brain, dug out an eye, and cut off an ear."⁹⁵ Clay was found to have escaped unharmed, the bullet having struck the silver-lined scabbard of his bowie knife.

At the next term of the Fayette Circuit Court Clay was indicted for mayhem. Public sentiment, strongly pro-slavery, was aligned against him, but he engaged the services of his great kinsman, Henry Clay, who won the day and secured acquittal for his client.

⁹⁵Coleman, Winston, Slavery Times in Kentucky, 305.

Cassius Clay now became the recognized leader of the small band of Lexington emancipationists, who had long been over-awed by the aggressive supremacy of the slave owners. "He was known as a fearless combatant, when aroused, and he possessed an iron will that carried him rough-shod over all obstacles."⁹⁶

When Clay was in his twenty-second year and a student at Yale he was chosen to deliver the senior class oration in commemoration of Washington's birthday. Even at that time he was troubled by the evils of slavery. In the midst of his eulogy of the great man he said: "When we come this day ... to lay our poor offering on the altar ... are there none afar off, cast down and sorrowful ... who cannot put their hands to their hearts and say. 'Oh, Washington, what art thou to us? Are we not also freemen?'"⁹⁷

In 1835, however, when a member of the Kentucky Legislature, he made a speech opposing the calling of a constitutional convention to emancipate the slaves. He argued that the time was not ripe for such action because of the "fanatical incendiaries" of the North who were threatening to spread "fire and blood through our once secure and happy homes". He admitted that at one time he favored gradual

⁹⁶Ibid., 306.

⁹⁷Writings of C. M. Clay, Op. Cit., 42.

emancipation, because of the advantage which he perceived the free states to have over the slave states. However, he had discarded such sentiments because of "a spirit of dictation and interference rising in the North", and even in the halls of Congress.⁹⁸

But six years later he took his stand in the Legislature against the repeal of the Law of 1833 and took Mr. Calhoun, of Breckinridge County, to task for calling slavery "a blessing". "This", he said, "is strange doctrine to be heard in any country; but to urge it here among Kentuckians, is not only strange but monstrous."⁹⁹

He was still far from the position he was to occupy in 1845 and later. He maintained in 1841 that he was "no reformer of government. I leave slavery where I found it. It is not a matter of conscience with me; I press it not upon the consciences of others."¹⁰⁰ He would not accept the statement that "in those ancient countries where slavery existed the human intellect reached its highest development". He pointed out that slavery existed in all countries in ancient times and asked, "How came it that a cause so

⁹⁸ Ibid., 46.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 59.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 60.

general produced effects so limited?" Rome and Greece were great in spite of slavery not because of it.

"The Roman eagle, which never quailed before a foreign foe, was struck down by the slaves of Italy ..."¹⁰¹

In reply to the charge that he was an Abolitionist he said, "I stand opposed to the power of Congress to interfere with slaves at all ... The Abolitionists stand up for Congress and avow her power".¹⁰² He appealed to the self-interest of all parties in preventing the further importation of slaves. "If by the law the value of slave labor is increased, so also will the value of free labor, they are the same labor in the same market; and the price of slave labor must influence ... the labor of the free."¹⁰³

In 1843 when the annexation of Texas was being heatedly debated, he took his stand firmly against annexation. In a speech in Scott County in December of that year he asked his listeners what claims of sympathy Texas had on the people of the United States. The Texans had voluntarily banished themselves from all the advantages of their native country, "disavowed the glorious principle of the American Declaration of the rights of man, renounced the inestimable privileges

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 60.

¹⁰² Ibid., 65.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 69.

of the Federal Constitution ... and forgetful of all the ties of common blood, language, and home, they became the fellow subjects with a half-barbarian people, of a distant Spanish Prince".¹⁰⁴

He contended that the annexation of Texas to the United States was contrary to the Laws of Nations, and just cause of war on the part of Mexico. There was no necessity for expansion even if Mexico consented, save to spread the grasping power of the slave interests. Annexation was contrary to all the avowed principles of the American democracy.

From a constitutional point of view, he argued that annexation was illegal. "I care not for the precedents of the past, I declare that there is no power in the Federal Constitution by which a slave state can be admitted into this Union. Slavery cannot exist by the law of nature: it cannot exist by act of Congress."¹⁰⁵ Slavery had existed by law of the sovereign states when the Constitution was formed. "If they vested in Congress the power to make a slave, then they at the same time yielded the power to unmake him. If then the Congress can make a slave state, she can unmake a slave state; and if she has that power, it is her

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 79.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 84.

bounden duty not to add new slave states to the Union, but to purge it immediately of this fatal disease." ...¹⁰⁶

He wished that his voice "might reach every log cabin in this wide and lovely land ... but ... the press is sealed like the Apocalyptic books, which human power cannot open, and darkness broods over the land once more ..." ¹⁰⁷

As to opinion in the North on slavery, he divided it into three classes. First, was a small band of Abolitionists, who were for violence, if necessary, in exterminating slavery. They were few and deserved and received the execration of good men in both the North and South. Second, was the Liberty party, "embracing a large portion of the virtue, intelligence, and legal knowledge, the Christianity, and patriotism of the North". They appealed to the ballot box, "not the bayonet", and expected to achieve a bloodless revolution. Clay aligned himself with this group and looked forward to the time when their rapid increase would absorb the political power of the North. Lastly, was the great class of northern men, who were opposed to slavery on principle, but who forbore to take any active part for its removal because they feared the consequences of such action.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 87.

He protested against the lack of freedom of speech and of the press.

Because I am willing to allow that the six hundred thousand free white citizens of this commonwealth have some rights as well as we slaveholders, I am to be run down as an Abolitionist. . . I cannot write an answer to a complimentary letter from Mr. Giddings, of Ohio, but I am published throughout the land as an enemy to my country. And when in the New York Tribune I set forth my true position . . . my letter was denied publication in the presses of both political parties; and yet still goes on the eternal prating about the freedom of the press.¹⁰⁸

Again he refuted the charge that he was an Abolitionist.

"That I am an Abolitionist in the sense, that I would take away, without just compensation, the rights of property in slaves . . . my letter to the Tribune which is before the world disproves."¹⁰⁹

There appeared in the February 19, 1845, issue of The Lexington Observer and Reporter a notice that "Cassius M. Clay, and others, slaveholders and non-slaveholders, propose to publish a paper devoted to gradual and constitutional emancipation".¹¹⁰ In an editorial in the same issue the Observer said:

We do not pretend to question the clear constitutional right of Mr. Clay . . . to establish a press devoted to this or any other purpose . . . In our judgment Mr. Clay has taken the very worst time . . . to begin the agitation of this great and delicate subject . . . we do not believe that the country is at all with him on this question . . . We do not know anyone whom under other circumstances we should welcome to the Editorial Corps with more cordiality than

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 90.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 91

¹¹⁰ The Lexington Observer and Reporter, February 19, 1845.

Mr. Clay, but . . .¹¹¹ he is embarked in a very hopeless undertaking.

By February 18, Clay had 240 subscriptions in Kentucky and expected five or six thousand elsewhere mostly in the North and East. The first number appeared on June 3, 1845. Before its last issue on August 19, there were 300 state subscribers and 2700 abroad.

A squib on the editorial page of the June 3 issue stated that subscriptions were increasing so fast that the True American would be unable to furnish back numbers "which are so much beyond our probable estimate".

The editor inclosed a note in the June 10 issue stating that 500 extra copies of the first issue had been "immediately absorbed; our list [of subscribers] is increasing rapidly at home and abroad".

A brief notice in a later issue stated that the subscription list of the True American had doubled in four weeks.

Clay had engaged the services of William Neale, a printer, and rented a building at Number 3 North Mill Street, in Lexington. Conscious of the fact that public reaction to the publication might reach the stage of violence, Clay had iron bars fitted over the windows and doors, an arsenal of Mexican lances and pikes was secured, and two brass cannon were mounted on the staircase leading to the upperchambers, and trained

¹¹¹ Ibid.

on the street door. A trapdoor in the roof provided an avenue of escape, in case the fortress could not hold, and Clay had secreted an infernal machine in the basement which could be exploded from without, in case the building were captured and held by his adversaries.

The physical appearance of the paper was patterned after the style of that day. It consisted of one over size six column sheet of paper, folded once, thus furnishing four over sized pages. In the upper left hand corner of page one was the usual printer's notice with subscription rates. Directly below this, in all thirteen issues, was a bit of contemporary poetry of several stanzas. An additional poem was sometimes added at the top of column one on page two. These poems were generally of a contemplative, spiritual tone, but never dealt with slavery. The rest of page one was taken up generally with a long report, frequently a reprint from an out of state paper, of some anti-slavery convention; or else with long letters from the Reverend Francis Wayland, of Providence, Rhode Island, to the Reverend Richard Fuller, of Beaufort, South Carolina, discussing the Biblical history of slavery and its ethical and moral aspects. Sometimes this space was occupied by letters from such anti-slavery stalwarts as Horace Greeley, W. H. Seward, or Garrett

Smith, to various anti-slavery conventions, regretting their inability to attend the convention but expressing sympathy with the ideals to be fostered.

Page two was generally occupied largely by two features; one headlined "Pro-Slavery", in which the defenders of the "peculiar institution" attempted to justify it; the other with the headline "Anti-Slavery", in which slavery was shown to be a great moral, economic, and political evil. In between these two main features might be found miscellaneous articles on such innocuous subjects as fishing, scientific agriculture, traveling, foreign customs, or history. Infrequently, news items were placed on this page, but they were generally reserved for page four, which furnished ample space for their paucity. Letters to the editor, either approving or disapproving of the policy of the paper, or commending or threatening the editor had no special place reserved for them. They might and did appear on any of the four pages.

Page three was the editorial page. It was here that Cassius Clay poured forth his strongly held convictions on the question of slavery in a strange mixture of restraint, common sense, good judgment; and a crusading fervor dressed in language which was frequently savage and vitriolic, if not incendiary.

No phase of the evil system was too delicate for him to discuss in plain blunt language, and no individual of the slavocracy was powerful enough to be immune from the castigating lashes of his pen. Robert Wickliffe and the slave girl, Emily, were to him characters of equal infamy who deserved exposure, and they got it.

Counterfeiting was a common crime of that day and hardly an issue of the paper was printed without a warning to "Beware of Counterfeiters", with a story of their recent deprivations in a nearby region. This was generally relegated to page four, about half of which was taken up with advertisements. The interest created by stories of counterfeiters was capitalized on by clever advertisers who frequently depicted the virtues of their product under the startling headline "Beware of Counterfeiters". The gullible reader would be half through the advertisement before it dawned on him that the counterfeiter whom he was to "Beware" was some competitive product which pretended to accomplish the same results as those of the advertiser. Such ads as the following were not uncommon:

"Beware of Counterfeits
Tis found at last
A cure for Consumption
Wister's Balsalm of Wild Cherry"

Then would follow a series of testimonial letters

telling how the afflicted had been greatly improved of his ailment after having consumed a limited number of bottles. Root Beer and Sasparilla Weed were advertised in almost every issue. William Neale, the printer of the True American, advertised for job printing. There were prospectuses of various periodicals to be published. R. M. Bartlett's Commercial College advertised regularly, as also did The Western Lancet "devoted to Medical and Surgical Sciences". Transylvania Medical School was a regular advertiser, and several issues advertised the Farmer's Almanac. In one issue a "new and cheap law book by Weeson and Wesley" was advertised on sale at Charles Marshall's. In addition there were frequently ads from various tradesmen wishing to render service or dispose of merchandise. But never did the total number of ads in any issue fill as much as half of one page.

Under the title on page one was a streamer in bold type which read:

Devoted to Universal Liberty; Gradual Emancipation in Kentucky; Literature; Agriculture; the Elevation of Labor, Morally and Politically; Commercial Intelligence.

These were the ideals for which the True American stood, and for the achievement of which Cassius M. Clay sacrificed domestic peace, fame, fortune; and for which he risked his life.

IV. The True American: Letters and Editorials

Freedom of the Press, Economics, Constitutional
Aspects of Slavery, Texas, Emancipation, Social
Aspects of Slavery, Maria, Religion and Slavery,
Foreign Aspects of Slavery, Slave Trade, Emily,
Miscellaneous Letters and editorials, Conclusion.

Horace Greeley said that the liberty of the press was "the palladium of all true liberty; with it despotism is impossible; without it, inevitable".¹¹² If wrongs and abuses can be freely discussed and exposed, the right must prevail. Wherever evil triumphs it does so because the few are more powerful than the many, because of intelligence and the command of material resources, while the many are handicapped by ignorance and poverty.

Whenever any subject will not bear discussion because it is too delicate, critical, or inflammable, it is doomed. Such was the attitude of the apologists for slavery in the decades preceding the final extinction of that "peculiar institution". It was in these circumstances that Cassius M. Clay in the early 1840's raised his voice against the evils of slavery in his native habitat where he saw these evils practiced. Very few were the voices who joined him, while thousand were loud in condemning him.

But it was difficult to discover plausible grounds on which to assail him. His wealth, social position, and political prospects were such as to remove any doubt of sinister motives on his part. All these he sacrificed, while he could only receive

¹¹²

Writings of C. M. Clay, Preface by Horace Greeley.

in exchange the gratitude of an abject and servile caste, too ignorant even to learn who their champion was, or what he was sacrificing, or achieving. He could not be charged with seeking to profit by the spoliation of others, for he too was a slaveholder for some time after. His public honors must be forfeited and friendships shaken by the course he had resolved on.

While a member of the Legislature, Clay supported the common school system, internal improvements, and an improved jury system. From the time that Clay became convinced that his duty to an oppressed and degraded race required of him a public and persistent effort to awaken similar convictions in others, he was restricted and suppressed by limitations on the freedom on the press. For a time in the early 1840's he was a prolific correspondent to the Lexington Observer and Reporter, but as his writings became more and more inflammatory, the columns of that paper were closed to him. This and other experiences caused him to agree with Greeley that freedom of the press was the sine qua non of liberty and democracy. He called it "the chief guaranty of all liberty, civil and religious".¹¹³ He could not imagine a despotism to exist with freedom of speech and the press, nor could he conceive of a free

¹¹³ Writings of C. M. Clay, Op. Cit., 37.

government existing without it. This proposition was sealed "by the unanimous vote of the most brilliant intellects, and truest spirits of all ages."¹¹⁴ This was so self evident as to remove the necessity of arguing its truth.

He did, however, point out the universality of this truth. "The liberty of speech and the press must extend to all subjects whatever, or else there is not liberty at all. The moment you bind it with the least possible cord it dies."¹¹⁵ He pointed out various instances to prove this point.

The Pope says: discuss freely all subjects, but don't touch with profane hands, holy things - don't canvass religion! There is no liberty, then, in Popedom. The Czar of Russia says: discuss all things else but don't meddle with my tenure of power! There is no liberty in the Russias . . . The United States say: abuse, if you please, the Pope, denounce the Czar . . . but don't interfere with slavery - that's a delicate relation - a "peculiar institution" - let that alone or we'll lynch you! There is then no liberty in America. So long as there is one thing in a nation which cannot be discussed - there is no freedom of speech or the press in that nation.¹¹⁶

Clay thought "the abuses" of the liberty of the press were distinct from freedom of the press. A man might be punished for slander, and freedom of speech remain intact. The crime in such a case is not in speaking

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 39.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 54.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 55.

but in speaking a lie. To destroy freedom of speech because men sometimes lie would be as absurd as to destroy government because it is sometimes disobeyed. "The liberty of the press is not terrible in its lies, but in its truth: and truth is terrible only to criminals!"¹¹⁷

Those who advocate suppression of the truth, do so not because they are afraid of being slandered, but because they are afraid the truth will be told on them. "The most bloody tyrants, when their corruptions are about to be exposed, all at once are awfully shocked, lest some madman may, with reckless innovation, destroy the peace and security of the people . . ."¹¹⁸

On page one of the first issue of the True American was published a letter signed "Junius", discussing freedom of the press. Junius disclaimed any such protection for the press as the New York Tribune had called for in a recent editorial in that paper. The Tribune, according to Junius, had claimed the "privilege of outraging the feelings and condemning the settled sentiments of a community with perfect impunity." Junius believed that the press should be protected only so long as it conformed to a well regulated and established public opinion; and greater freedom than this cannot be desired or submitted to by any one who

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 76.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 77.

observes order and respects the law.¹¹⁹ "The press", he went on, "being subject to no legislative restraints, it is so much the more important that it should be held to a strict accountability to public opinion . . . The press is licentious . . . whenever it is called on to redeem its responsibility or, in other words, whenever it becomes obnoxious to public aversion, whatever may be the private sentiments or views of an individual - to injure or destroy his property - to disturb the public peace or attempt to subvert the government."¹²⁰ Whenever the press was guilty of these or similar things it was deserving of censure and should be punished by public opinion, "and popular action too, if necessary."

In his opening editorial on June 3, Clay roasted Junius, a Whig, and Robert Wickliffe for having advocated any abridgement of freedom of the press in regard to his publication of the True American. Wickliffe he called "a living but ungrateful monument of the forbearing mercy of the people", in that despite all his hypocrisy and his oppression of their interests, he still was permitted to maintain his wealth and appearance of respectability. "The victims of incendiary publications¹²¹ have not yet imbued their hands in the blood of this

¹¹⁹ True American, June 3, 1845.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Robert W. Wickliffe was a prolific publisher of pamphlets in which he vituperately scored his enemies, political and personal.

man . . . The armies of men, women, and children whom he has robbed, by the dishonest juggling of the law . . . have not come up in mass, in their great and remediless woe, and thrown his torn limbs to the dogs: and yet he stands, at the age of seventy, advocating violence."

Clay discredited the threats of violence of these two and hurled defiance back at them.

Though under the ban of popular proscription, baited by the wide spread tongue of slander, and the relentless denunciations of men in power, set on by bands of hireling assassins, still undismayed, planting ourselves up on the firm basis of our birthright, Constitutional liberty, and the world wide principles of truth and justice, we hurl back defiance against these cowardly outlaws.

He called on all slaveholders to respect the Constitution and to not be led to violence by the incantations of Wickliffe and his kind. He denied that he and his followers were anarchists or agrarians.

"We claim to be conservatives of the highest order; and for this reason and no other reason than because we are such, we intend, if our humble life is spared, to look into the very bottom of this thing of slavery," to see if it be a safe foundation of prosperity "to us and our children, or not". Clay said he came "not to bring war but peace - to save, not destroy". He felt deeply the responsibility of his part. "It strips us of all personal ambition and private ends." He asked the

just and patient forbearance of his countrymen.

Could anything be more paradoxical than the beginning of this editorial and the end? It is indicative of the violent emotionalism and lack of poise which Clay was to exhibit throughout his publication, and, indeed, throughout his life.

Following this was a long editorial decrying Lynch law. Then a news item stating that the French House of Peers had passed an act for the gradual emancipation of slaves in all the colonies and dominions of that power. Next was a letter to Robert Wickliffe denying any connection between the Abolitionist William C. Bell and the True American, as charged by Wickliffe.

On page two of the June 3 issue was a reprint from the Gazette signed by a Whig, calling on all pro-slavery advocates to unite in opposition to the True American. It, too, spoke of an alliance between the Whigs and Abolitionists.

The same issue contained a letter from Robert Wickliffe, Sr., and reprinted from the Kentucky Gazette. The "Old Duke" declined a nomination for the State Senate on the grounds of age and ill health. He charged that unless the Whigs were overthrown in the state, Fayette County and her neighbors were doomed to feel the severest evils. "If they [the voters] refuse

the light from every source, the torches of the incendiary will continue to give them the horrid glare of their factories and dwellings."¹²² Wickliffe took notice of the True American in his statement: "This party [Whigs] is adding to their masked presses, an open and avowed abolition press in the city of Lexington."

On July 15 was a notice stating that Col. Henry Clay of Bourbon County had become a subscriber. The True American exuberated:

"Standing, as he admittedly does, at the very head of the farming interest for his calm judgment and practical good sense, it cannot but have a happy influence upon that class who erroneously believes that they will be injured by emancipation."

Page three also carried a letter addressed to Cassius M. Clay, signed "Revengers", and postmarked at Louisville. The letter was a savage attack upon Clay personally, and closed with the threat, "Eternal hatred is locked up in the bosoms of brave men, your betters, for you. The hemp is ready for your neck. Your life cannot be spared."

On the back page of the issue of June 10 was printed a letter of Edgar Needham to the Louisville Courier repudiating the sentiments the Courier charged he expressed at the Anti-Slavery Convention in Cincinnati in June, where a resolution was passed condoning the "underground railroad". Needham claimed

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True American, June 3, 1845.

he spoke against the resolution, and did what he could to defeat it, and therefore, was not responsible for the sentiments of the majority who passed it. He averred that he favored only legal emancipation of Kentucky's slaves.

A letter to the True American in the issue of June 10, and signed "J.M.C.", took issue with Clay's first editorial, outlining his beliefs and objects in establishing the True American. It charged Clay with an attempt to stir the passions of the citizenry to violent action. "Is not the gentleman, in appearance, endeavoring to provoke the quiet and orderly citizen of Lexington into mob violence? . . . He seeks persecution, and I hope fondly he will be unable to find it . . . If C. M. Clay should find no opportunity to spit out the poison which is accumulating in his very heart, it will eventually cause his own destruction. . . If it [the True American] lives it will feast upon slander, and delight to participate in feasts of mobocracy, insurrection, and revolution."

On June 17 was an article regarding the Needham controversy, copied from the Louisville Journal. The Journal was fully persuaded that the large majority of people in the free states held correct views "as regards any action of theirs", and that they neither

desired to interfere in what did not concern them, nor had they any sympathy with ultra anti or pro-slavery men. They are disposed to leave Garrison to his fanaticism, and to treat with contempt, the madness of McDuffie or Hammond." It urged the Southern press to tell the "whole truth" with regard to the people of the free states."

On June 24 was a letter from John G. Fee to C. M. Clay defending Needham's actions at the Cincinnati convention. Fee said that at the convention no one dreamed of "forcing things in Kentucky". The means to be employed were the presentation of truth, the force of moral suasion, and the constitutional right of the ballot box. Fee hoped that "a convention for a similar purpose will soon be held in Kentucky".

An article in the July 16 issue of the Lexington Observer and Reporter observed that the arguments of the True American were being noticed and answered by the pro-slavery press. It admonished the latter that this was just the kind of attention the True American courted and warned the pro-slavers to "Beware of them" [Emancipationists].

The same issued copied from the Hopkinsville (Ky.) Gazette "A Warning" to the people of Kentucky. The True American was evidence of a pre-existing state of public sentiment, favorable to its objects". Clay's

editorials "abound in proofs that he is filled with the spirit of a selfish and fierce fanaticism." The Gazette hoped that a discerning public would leave Clay to his own proud passions, "to beat the air like a madman, and he will soon exhaust his power to harm." The Gazette opposed a Constitutional Convention and urged the voters to elect only representatives to the Legislature who would vote against a convention.

A letter to the Georgetown (Ky.) Herald from Robert P. Snell, said all emancipationist talk could not set free a single slave, and could result only in the injury of the slaves, since they would become dissatisfied and "cause thousand of stripes to be laid on them in order to keep them in proper subjection".

On July 29 there was an editorial from the Kentucky Compiler protesting against the sentiments and news published in the True American. The Compiler thought the True American was "thoroughly abolitionist", and that it manifested such a recklessness of consequences "as will draw largely on the forbearance . . . of the community . . . We regard the paper as insurrectionary". It exposed the sanctity and safety of the homestead to imminent peril. "The midnight incendiary, in the act of applying torches to a dwelling, might with as much propriety, demand to be allowed to perpetrate his crime; as a publication like this to claim the

sanction of the community . . . [This publication] may . . . greatly disturb the peace of society."

Here was a call to the citizenry to regard the True American as a criminal in the act of committing a crime, and suggesting that it be prevented. But at the bottom of the editorial, Clay put in his own post-script. "It is too late - Ed. T. A."

On July 31 an editorial from the Scioto Gazette advocated emancipation but denounced abolition as a "mis-judged and ill-advised course of certain men here at the North whose zeal outruns their reason". It called them "brawlers who infest the North, the Birneys and Tappans, whose every loud profession mark them as hypocrites, and whose deeds brand them as knaves . . .". The Gazette thought there had long been a sentiment in favor of emancipation in Kentucky. It compared the poverty of Kentucky with the wealth of Ohio, and concluded that "Paid labor is indispensable to the prosperity of a state. Labor is a state's true wealth."

In an editorial on July 15 Clay contrasted the "mild tone" of the True American with the "rabid utterances" of the pro-slavery press. "Their press teems with talk of murder, insurrection, rape, and fire. . . ." while his said that the slave and freedman were impotent. He asked, "whose paper is the most dangerous to fall into the hands of slaves? . . ."

Again he launched into a defiance of and tentative acceptance of violent warfare with his enemies". . . War is declared: it depends upon the slave party, who proclaimed it, to say, whether it is to be carried on by the ordinary laws of civilized nations, or whether it shall be Savage and Heathen - 'war to the knife'."

In still another editorial he warned the pro-slavery party of the North not to take the press of the South as a ". . . criterion of public sentiment . . ." as they were the mouthpieces of the slaveholders who ". . . hold the bread of the press in their hands. . . ." He thought the seeds of an independent party had been planted,¹²³ ". . . a party . . . of sure success - and lasting power - traitors . . . in the eyes of the . . . slavocracy - but patriots and immortals . . ."

In the same issue Clay had an editorial against the use of violence in the settlement of political questions. "In resisting by violence even a manifestly unjust act, he [the citizen] violates the principles of all government, by not submitting to the laws, till changed by constitutional means . . ." In resisting an isolated case of oppression he opened the door to

¹²³ Apparently Clay thought the Whig Party was being won over to an anti-slavery stand, for in the issue of July 29, two weeks hence, he is to write the Cincinnati Convention his determination to remain with the Whig Party.

the loss of "every means of liberty".¹²⁴

An editorial on the "Influence of Public Opinion in the July 29 issue, thought that the "clear and luminous gaze" of public opinion was now being turned full on the slave and the slaveholder. Already had its effects been felt, for ". . . like destiny itself, that effect is inevitable, if not immediate. Already has it arrested the whip in the hands of the task master . . . increased his [the slave's] allowance of food and raiment - shortened his hours of toil, and lengthened his hours of repose . . ."

The accusation had been made by the pro-slavery faction that the True American was being distributed to slaves as an instrument to incite them to revolt. In an editorial Clay denied this and explained his policy of refusing to permit the paper to be delivered to any slave, even when sent by his subscribing master, unless the slave had a written order from the master. Clay did not think there was any material in the paper harmful to slaves, as he published "only such matter as might fall harmlessly into the hands of any portion of our population. . . ." Still it was his desire to be read only by his "free white fellow citizens". If he ever succeeded in ridding Kentucky of the evils of slavery, his only hope of doing so was by inducing the

¹²⁴

True American, July 15, 1845.

"highminded intelligent freemen" of the state to
"reason, reflect, and then pursue the right".

The June 3 issue contained an article reprinted from The National Intelligencer and signed by A Carolinian. The article dealt with the economics of slavery and explained that growth of population in the slave states would stop when all available cotton, tobacco, and sugar lands were brought under production. Excess slaves would then be shipped to new lands in the West. The white population would not increase in slave states because the whites would migrate to free territory. The South had few towns because there was a dearth of mechanics. There was a dearth of mechanics because there was no class to support them. Not only was industry prevented by slavery but agriculture was more expensive under slave labor than free, because of the fact that too much capital was tied up in the ownership of slaves.¹²⁵

On page two of this issue was an article from the Western Citizen and Daily News, signed by Enoch Kingsbury. This article compared the wealth, schools, shipping, exports, imports, manufactures, literary production, roads, and indeed all phases of economy and culture of Massachusetts and Virginia, to the great disadvantage of the latter - Kingsbury attributed this to freedom in Massachusetts and slavery in Virginia.

On the same page was another article dealing with economics, and signed by "Incognito". This article deplored the results of slavery on both the whites and blacks and upon the economy of the state, but would not accept emancipation as a solution because the "aspirations of the freedmen and the disdain of the whites would inevitably lead to race conflicts."

An article on June 10 entitled "Light at the South", by William Gregg, of South Carolina, and reprinted from the New York Tribune, contrasted the industry of the North with the indolence of the South, and the resultant richness of the North and the poverty of the South. The South was buying too many things from the North she should have been producing.

On the second page of the July 1 issue was a letter to the editor signed "A.M.B.". The letter was entitled "The Policy of Rewarding Industry". It opened with the statement: "Man will efficiently labor and live harmoniously when this great primordial law is honored, the right of possession and disbursement legitimately belongs to the producer." From here it went on to show the unproductivity and inefficiency of slave labor as compared to free. Also, that when labor is compulsory it will be regarded as menial, and that consequently whites will either abstain from honest toil because they fear it will damage their

standing in the community, or else they will migrate to a free state. "Slavery renders labor undignified and odious, drives the skilled mechanic and free laborer from his employment and from his home, burdens society with a horde of vicious idlers, and saps the foundation of all true estimation of character, by making idleness and labor the criterion of respectability."

On June 17 there was a long article entitled "Progress and Abolition", and reprinted from the Lexington Inquirer. It asked a "patriotic and reverential" people what they thought of a scheme, which under the alluring and delusive name of "human progress", aimed at demolishing landmarks raised and ordained by the wisdom of ages, and the necessities of mankind. It compared slavery to the feudal system and showed how the latter was swept away, not by a movement in behalf of "human progress", nor in a day, nor in a century; but as a result of "decay on the one side, and invigoration on the other." The author thought it remained yet to be shown that the classes in other lands who performed the menial duties of life, "are in any respects happier or more comfortable than the slaves are in Kentucky." He denied the accuracy of reports of economists who claimed that free states were wealthier than slave states, and eulogized the "intangible" and "superior"

virtues of Kentuckians over their Northern brothers.

"If the citizens of Kentucky are individually as happy as those of Ohio, it is a matter of no moment to them, whether they are happy at the rate of fifty or five hundred souls to the square mile." He thought there was more of abject misery among the "guilty and unfortunate Cyprions" of one great city of the North, in one long winter, than slavery occasioned in Kentucky in ten years. "Let them award to female labor some adequate reward, so that the penniless middlewoman, shall have other means of avoiding starvation besides prostitution and crime. . . . Let them eradicate the all pervading evils which render each of their boasted cities a reeking Sodom." The article closed with the opinion that "Those of the Abolitionists who are not hypocrites and knaves, are the victims of vanity and self-righteousness."

On June 17 a letter to Clay from "L.M." in Paris, Illinois, deeply deplored the evils of slavery. L. M. related how he was forced to move from Kentucky because of the competition of slaveholders. He had a "deep and abiding conviction" that to the influences of slavery alone "is it owing that Kentucky is behind her younger sister Ohio in population and in substantial wealth."

A recopy from the Sunday Visiter on June 24 reported agitation in western Virginia for a constitutional convention in Virginia to change the basis of representation. The western inhabitants claimed that the present system allowed "chattels to be represented" and deprived them of their just rights, and made them dependent upon the "slave holding aristocracy of Eastern Virginia". They were also irritated by the refusal of their state legislature to give the B. and O. Railway a right of way through western Virginia. They attributed this refusal to the jealousies of the East.

On the back page of the July 15 issue was a letter to Clay from "Amicus" written from Columbus, Ohio. Amicus was the son of a Kentucky slaveholder who suffered misfortune in the loss of his property. Amicus at the age of twenty-five was engaged in mechanical work in Lexington, when he invented a "Hydrostatic machine" and tried to get backing for its manufacture, but failed. He took the advice of friends and moved to Ohio where financial backing and success had been secured. Amicus concluded that: "It is impossible for any man to move to and live in Ohio, witness the prosperity and note the general happiness of the people without more or less attributing it to her free institutions and exemption from slavery."

Another article on July 1 from the New York Journal of Commerce discussed a Philadelphia pamphlet proposing that the Federal Government purchase all slaves at \$100 per head and free them, and that tariff rates be raised to meet this charge. The Journal doubted that slaveholders would be willing to part with their slaves at that price, and knew that the Abolitionists would not agree "to pay men not to sin". The Journal compared Virginia and Kentucky with Pennsylvania and Ohio, showing that the natural endowments of the two slave states were as great as those of the two free states. "But the curse of slavery has cast a blight over them till large districts are abandoned. . . and in the states at large, the population has become almost stationary, while that of the non-slaveholding states, similarly situated. . . is increasing with immense rapidity."

An extract from the Boston Courier compared the economic and cultural conditions in Massachusetts and Virginia, much to the latter's disadvantage, and despite the much more favorable natural resources of Virginia. The inference from this article was that slavery brings poverty.

In an editorial on June 3, entitled "Slavery the Enemy of Genius" Clay quoted from Mr. Griswold showing that of eighty-five recognized American

poets of genius, seventy-seven were from the free states, and only eight from slave states.

In the next issue, that of June 10, Clay contented himself with one long editorial concerning slavery, mostly on its economic aspect. Taking them one by one he showed that all free states had surpassed in wealth all slave states. Education in slave states was backward because "vast tracts of large farms" separated the people and made schools impractical. Slaves were not half so efficient as free labor, because of lack of self-interest. There was more immorality in slave states than in free. "Between liberty and slavery there is not, there cannot be, any compromise . . . As sure as God regards the right, Kentucky shall be free."

He called on all classes to consider their individual interests and to decide whether or not they were benefitted by slavery:

Lawyers, merchants, mechanics, laborers, who are your consumers? Robert Wickliffe's 200 slaves? How many clients do you find, how many goods do you sell, how many hats, coats, saddles, and trunks do you make for these 200 slaves? Does Mr. Wickliffe lay out as much for himself and his 200 slaves as 200 freemen do? . . . We stand for the whites, Mr. Wickliffe for the slaves - if any fighting is to be done will you stand by us who would put bread in the mouths of your children, or by Mr. Wickliffe, who hates and fears you because he knows he injures you.

Here again, Clay starts with a calm and reasoned appeal to the intelligence of his readers, but cannot at the end refrain from stirring up thoughts of violence, and of persuading them that they are hated and injured by Robert Wickliffe.

In an editorial on July 15 Clay paid tribute to the opening of the Miami Canal, linking Toledo and Cincinnati, as a "triumph of free labor".

Only one editorial on August 5 concerned itself with slavery. It unfavorably compared Kentucky's condition in regard to "labor, manufactures, and commerce" to that of Indiana, Ohio, and Illinois. Clay thought the appeals to humanity and justice had been overdone with regard to slavery, and could never be efficacious so long as "interest and avarice stand in the way".

The True American dealt at some length with the constitutional and legal aspect of slavery. Both in news items and in editorial opinion C. M. Clay brought before his readers food for thought on this question, and attempted to establish, as well as he could, the tyrannical nature of a government which would legalize slavery.

On the front page of the June 3 issue was a report of the trial in Indianapolis in which a Kentuckian named Tipton was involved. Tipton had removed from

Kentucky to Illinois, carrying three slaves with him, whom he later sold in Missouri. The Negroes escaped to Indiana, and when pursued were aided to escape by one Williams. Suit was brought by the purchaser, Vaughan, against Williams under a Congressional Act of 1793. The suit was tried in the Federal Circuit Court of Appeals and Justice McLean, of the Supreme Court ruled that Tipton, had by his actions, freed the Negroes.¹²⁶

The front page of the issue of June 24, carried the report of a slavery trial in New Jersey. Edward Van Buren was holding Mary Tebout in servitude, alleging he purchased her as a slave and that under the emancipation law of New Jersey she would be a slave until she reached the age of twenty-one. Alvin Stewart, representing Mary, argued that by the Federal Constitution as well as the New Jersey Constitution, no person could be held to involuntary servitude without "due process of law". Therefore, every child of a slave was born free, since there was no mark of "due process" to enslave them. "Freedom is an inalienable right to which all are born". Stewart denied the existence of any power in the Constitution of the United States to "denude or strip one innocent human being of the right I have enumerated". This was

¹²⁶

True American, June 3, 1845.

revolutionary doctrine, indeed, which struck at the very foundation of slavery.¹²⁷

A reprint from the Bangor (Maine) Gazette on June 24, reviewed the history of emancipation in the states and territories of the Union and rejoiced in the wisdom of the Ordinance of 1787 which made the great western territories free. "From them . . . the groan of the slave will never be heard, except where some poor fugitive shall be hunted and overtaken by the man thief, under the provision of the plundering law of the American Congress of 1793, and the Godless decisions of the Supreme Court of the United States."

On July 10, in an editorial addressed to working men Clay warned that "that nation which shall by violence of unjust legislation" fail to protect us in our labor, "cannot stand long before the spirit of the age". The opponents of slavery in Kentucky in 1845 were centering their attentions on the calling of a

¹²⁷ True American, June 24, 1845.

The New Jersey Constitution of 1804 freed all slaves born after that year; females at the age of twenty-one; males at the age of twenty-five. Stewart attacked the inhumanity and illegality of this long period of "apprenticeship" when the child is "bound to the man who is her greatest enemy". i.e. had done the greatest wrong to its parents - holding them in slavery. He argued that a contractual relationship did not exist between the master and slave, since the latter had no voice to approve or disapprove his state. He pointed out that fathers frequently sold their own children borne of slaves into bondage. "The picture is startling, frightful, revolting; but it is neither over-drawn nor too highly colored."

constitutional convention to change the state constitution so as to permit the legal emancipation of slaves. Naturally the True American was a leader in this movement and devoted much space to discussing the pros and cons of calling a convention.

On June 10 a letter copied from the Hopkinsville Gazette and signed "Justice" argued against the holding of a Constitutional Convention because of the danger arising out of the slavery question.

In the issue of June 10, the Rev. John G. Fee proposed, and the True American seconded the calling of a "convention of all the opponents of slavery . . . to be held in Frankfort on the fourth day of July, 1846, to take measures to bring about, by peaceable and constitutional means, the emancipation of our gallant state from slavery."¹²⁸ Clay, in the same article, advised the publication of a paper in Louisville, "to be owned and conducted exclusively by non-slaveholders and laboring men."

In an editorial on July 22, Clay said that the defeat of the constitutional convention a few years before was no proof that slavery ". . . is firm on its throne of despotic and unrelenting power. . ."

¹²⁸ Note the emphasis placed on emancipating the state from slavery. It was argued by most emancipationists that, great as was the evil done by the "peculiar institution" to the slaves, the wrong done the whites was even greater.

Thousands of emancipationists, including himself, were against the convention then for reasons other than slavery. But when the question arises again, ". . . it will be on the main issue, slavery, or liberty! . . ." then ". . . we will come up to the polls like regular soldiers, with the spirit of '76, Liberty or Death!"

In the issue of July 29, Clay called on all opponents of slavery, regardless of the shade or extent of their opposition, to join in efforts to have a state convention to aid the cause of the slaves. He urged them ". . . if we are too ultra, we stand less chance of carrying our point. If we do not go far enough, go ahead of us. If you carry the Blacks to the Moon, and everybody is for carrying the Blacks to the Moon, then go into the Movement and into the Convention, vote us down. . . and we shall say well done!"

Politics and candidates for public office were discussed and closely examined in the columns of the True American. In 1845 much of the slavery controversy centered about the question of the annexation of Texas. Mexico had never recognized Texas' independence but had done nothing toward reconquering that revolutionary province in almost a decade. Texas was eager for admission into the Union and the pro-slavery party was urging the admission. The anti-slavery forces, however, convinced that

the Texas revolt was a plot of the slavocracy to expand their evil institution, were determined that Texas must never come into the Union.

On June 17 a questionnaire from the Lexington Inquirer directed five questions on the slavery controversy to "all candidates to Congress and the Legislature from Fayette County". The questionnaire asked if the candidate was in favor of abolition; emancipation, gradual or immediate; of what course he proposed for dealing with the freedmen in the event of emancipation; if he favored any change in the Constitution of Kentucky, and what; and whether or not he favored repeal of the Law of 1833.

On June 24 was a letter from Robert F. Baird, candidate for Congress from Jefferson County, answering the slavery questionnaire. Baird advocated emancipation with colonization, showing the advantage to be reaped by the slave owner, slave, non-slaveholder, and by the state in general. He thought the consummation was ready at hand. There were 125,000 voters in the state. Of these, but 25,000 were slaveholders and many of them were anti-slavery men. "Let the people of Kentucky arise in the majesty of their strength - shake off their trammels, and the last nail will be driven into the coffin of slavery, and the monster, with all its horrors and all its horns, will be buried beneath

the soil of the free in the land of the brave."

Much of page two of the same issue was taken up with a letter from Thomas F. Marshall responding to the five questionnaires of the Inquirer.¹²⁹ Marshall stated that he was not in favor of abolition in Kentucky, and believed there was "no government on earth" endowed with the constitutional power to effect it. If there was he would resist its exercise. The idea of citizenship and equality compounded of liberated Negroes and the "descendants of the European chivalry" was an absurdity too monstrous for Abolitionism itself. "Shield me and mine from that philanthropy which would blend the crystal eye, the elevated feature, the ambrosial and waving curl, the rosy skin" and other attributes of "the favorite of nature" with the "disgusting peculiarities, the wool and grease and foetor of the blackened savage of the Southern deserts". He believed the "Saxon and the Celt, the Norman and the Dane, even the Tartar and the Hun, the Turk and the Saracen - the races of Japhet and Shem" might compound and melt and mingle into one people. But the race of Ham must "serve or separate".

From a legal point of view, Marshall argued that

¹²⁹ Thomas F. Marshall was a candidate for Congress from Fayette. C. M. Clay and Marshall had been political allies and personal friends a few years before, at which time Marshall had views on slavery similar to Clay's. Since that time Clay had become a stronger enemy of slavery and Marshall less so, and a bitter enmity had grown up between them.

laws advocated by emancipationists making unborn children of slaves free, were in violation of the Constitution. The General Government had no control over the institution within states or over trade between them. He was opposed, however, to the repeal of the Law of 1833. He thought the Abolitionists had grown much stronger recently and "are hostile to the Union" and "will be found the ready ally of any foreign power in any scheme to curb the Southern extension of our empire."

On the same page was a letter from Marshall's opponent, Garrett Davis, answering the same questionnaire.¹³⁰ He was not in favor of Abolition as "the worst population we now have are the free Negroes . . . Nothing is so revolting to me as the idea of admitting the black race to a political and social equality with the whites . . . the present condition of the black is best for both." He was not in favor of emancipation but believed if slavery were to cease in Kentucky, the liberated slaves should be removed. He was opposed to any change in the Constitution because it "might be made worse". He was not in favor of the "entire" repeal of the Law of 1833.

In another editorial in the same number Clay

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Garrett Davis was also a candidate for Congress from Fayette.

remarked that all candidates to office had answered the five questions put to them by the citizens of Fayette, and they answered them in the same way that the slave party had answered them for sixty years. ". . . They [the candidates] are all in favor of no discussion and letting those who have monopolized all the privileges of government alone . . . It is too late."

An editorial from the American Freeman did not condemn too strongly those who have been brought up in society where slavery existed, for not seeing its wrongs. The generality of our public men were mere politicians "intent on carrying . . . an election . . . [seeking] to gain over to one or another side the most important interests of the country". Consequently the slave interest "is propitiated with no small care . . . The Master's vote is too precious to be hazarded by sympathy with the slaves". Abolitionism is thus scorned without committing the politician to slavery. The Freeman urged a strong "reprobation of this great wrong".

The entire front page of the issue of June 17 was devoted to the address of a Convention of Delegates of the People of Massachusetts. The address was dated the preceding January and protested

the annexation of Texas by joint resolution of Congress as unconstitutional. They did not believe that any form of annexation would be constitutional. It denounced annexation as a plot of the slave states. It brought forth statements of Washington, Jefferson, Patrick Henry, John Jay and other sacred names, to condemn slavery. Testimony of the Constitutional Convention of 1789 was quoted to show that the slave states could not send sufficient troops to aid in the Revolutionary War, because of the danger of the slave insurrection at home. It further pointed out that with annexation would go the assumption of Texas' debts, and war with Mexico which was sure to follow. "Massachusetts denounces the iniquitous project . . . as the overthrow of the Constitution, the [severing of the] bond of the existing Union. She denounces it, as hostile to all the objects for which the Union was established. In the name of religion she denounces it. . . In the name of humanity she denounces it, as a deliberate and monstrous machination to secure the unlimited spread and sway of the scourge and curse of the human race."

Page two of the June 24 issue carried an article signed "Madison". The writer took issue with a speech purportedly delivered by Cassius Clay in Scott County on the subject of the annexation of Texas. Madison quoted Clay as saying: "I contend . . . that the

original thirteen states had, and now have, exclusive control over slavery within their borders, that in all places where Congress had, or now has exclusive control, where slavery did not previously exist by the sovereign power of the thirteen states - there slavery does not and cannot exist - that in no territory in this wide empire is there now a slave - that the Supreme Court, under a writ of habeas corpus, is bound to liberate any person so claimed as a slave." Madison called this a "rash and inconsiderate opinion" and held that Congress had the right to make all laws regulating conditions in the territories. Congress had on several occasions admitted new states into the Union, in many of which cases the new states had come in and remained slave states. The only way Congress could ever prohibit slavery in any new state was by making a provision against it, in the very terms of its admission. He attacked Clay's thesis that the Federal Constitution forbade the "taking of life, liberty, or property without due process of law", contending that this was a restriction only on the Federal Government and was not applicable to state governments.

An editorial from the New York Tribune discussed a speech by the Reverend William H. Channing on the subject of the annexation of Texas. Channing called

it a "slavocracy plot", to increase the value of slave property, and to prevent the escape of slaves from bondage. "We call ourselves freemen, and yet 3,000,000 of our people are not freemen; one-sixth of our population are held in slavery by one-thirtieth." He claimed that the annexation of Texas was the "deliberate destruction of the constitutional compact - we therefore go back to the original Declaration of Independence", that all men were free.

A letter to the Boston Journal on abolition, signed "Q", said the slavery question was likely to break up the Union. It suggested that money received from the sale of public lands be used by the Federal Government to purchase all slaves and set them free.

A reprint from the Morning News on July 1 expressed gratitude that Texas was "now safe" and looked further to more territorial acquisitions, asking "Who's the next customer? Shall it be California or Canada?"

Another reprint on the same subject, from the Morning Herald, doubted that the issue [of Texas and Oregon] is settled and thought war with Mexico and England might result. The Herald was sanguine about the outcome of such encounters, however, and looked forward to "the subjugation of the whole continent . . . If a good stand up fight with Britain be brought about,

so much the better".¹³¹

A reprint from the Courier and Enquirer deplored the manner of annexation, but thought the end justified the means. It argued that the annexation of Texas was beneficial to the slaves since they could now be moved from the "barren soils of Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, and Kentucky, where the produce of their labor barely enables their masters to clothe and feed them", and transplanted to Texas, "where a virgin soil and more genial climate will render their labor far more productive . . . and where consequently, they will be better fed, clothed, and cared for in the hour of sickness". It added that "it follows of course, that the Northern Slave States will ultimately get rid of the great curse under which they now labor". It was unconcerned about Mexico's attitude and asserted that if she declared war, "her capitol will soon be in our possession never to be surrendered . . . until the Californias are ceded to the United States."

Also on July 1 a reprint from the New York Tribune answered the pro-slavery press on the annexation of Texas. The Tribune thought that if the people of the country sanctioned the acquisition of

¹³¹ Polk had been elected the preceding November on the slogan "54° 40' or fight", and there was grave talk of war with both Great Britain and Mexico.

Texas, it would be impossible to arrest the "land-stealing banditti" until it should "revel in the halls of the Montezumas and feed its avarice with the gold of the Mexican churches". The present triumph of oppression and perfidy could be but temporary, and would recoil on the heads of its contrivers. "Let them riot in their falsely won victory while they may, but forget not the day of retribution."

On June 10 there was a letter from Thomas F. Marshall to the Frankfort Commonwealth denying that in his speeches in Indiana shortly before he had made the statement that both he and Henry Clay were Abolitionists. The letter stated that he would not favor emancipation unless accompanied by colonization. "Both races are more happy and more prosperous, in the relation of master and slave, than they would be after changing that relation, unless a place of salutary and beneficial separation could first be devised". Marshall predicted the loss of influence by the Abolitionists. "His [the Negro's] condition in this country is better ... under the guardianship and protection of a master, than it would be when liberated." Marshall went on to discuss the Texas question and expressed opposition to annexation, not because of slavery, but because of the conviction that annexation arose out of a fever for land speculation, and because it violated the right

of Mexico. "Remove these and Thomas Marshall will have no objection to annexation." However, he would fight to maintain Texas' right to decide the slavery question for herself.

Clay's main editorial on June 17 was a reply to a letter of Thomas Marshall to the Frankfort Commonwealth defending himself against the Whig accusation that he had become a renegade from that party by his advocacy of the pro-slavery cause. In his letter Marshall had bitterly assailed Cassius Clay as being among his chief calumniators.¹³²

Clay assailed Marshall for classifying all emancipationists as Abolitionists. He discredited Marshall's claim of political affinity with Henry Clay because he had supported the Missouri Compromise with Henry Clay. Cassius Clay said that the Missouri Compromise was an error on the part of both Henry Clay and Marshall. In his letter Marshall had advocated colonization of the freed Negroes, but Clay argued that colonization was both inexpedient and unjust. It was inexpedient because it added to the cost of freedom. "Shrewd slaveholders see this difficulty, and. . . they attempt to make us the slaves of our own prejudices, by exciting us against the Black,

¹³² Clay had published Marshall's letter in the June 17 issue.

till we are unwilling to live with him, when free, whilst they believe themselves secure against emancipation and removal, by the difficulties of its achievement." Thus, the slaveholders could be heard to say, "I am as much in favor of liberty as you, if you will send the blacks to the moon, but unless you send them to the moon, I'll see you damned before I assent to their liberation among us".

Clay went on to show that the people really injured by slavery were the mechanics.

If we tell our fellow laborers the real sentiments of such slaveholders as Marshall, it is because he has attempted to corrupt their minds by unjust and ignoble appeals to the lowest of human passions; they impoverish you by the tremendous and overpowering competition of slave labor and then cry out in extenuation of their conduct toward the blacks 'they are better off than the poor whites'; they first take away your bread, your schools, and all social advantages, and then add insult to injury by placing [you] . . . a degree below the slave.

Clay observed that it was recognized by all mechanics that penitentiary labor ruined their business, and that slave labor was equally ruinous. "Thus every laborer in Kentucky is injured by the 180,000 slaves." In regard to living with the freed Negroes, Clay said that "every man and woman in the country can choose his own companions, and so far as my knowledge goes, the wealthy have been more frequently in dishonorable intercourse with the blacks than the laboring poor".

The injustice of the free states toward emancipated

blacks was no excuse for the injustice of slavery. Moreover, the free states were recently improving the status of the blacks, so that soon Thomas Marshall would find himself "without the apology of companionship, the last miserable refuge of little souls."¹³³

So far as the slow processes of colonization were concerned, Clay wished it well, but considered it no solution for slavery. In regard to Texas, Clay agreed with Marshall that no European power should interfere with her but added that "if Texas comes into this Union as a territory, and she can come in no other way, that her slaves are free: and if she comes in as a state contrary to the Constitution and laws of this confederacy, as soon as we have the power we will put her out again". And transmitted down from generation to generation would go the watchword: "No more slave territory added to the Union, and the constitutional extinction of slavery in the present states."

On June 24 Clay had a long editorial answering the letter of "Madison" published in the same issue. "Madison" attacked a speech made by Clay in Scott County discussing the annexation of Texas. Clay proceeded to make his position clear on the

¹³³ True American, June 17, 1845.

constitutional aspects of slavery. "We enter the sanctuary of American liberty, sword in hand, determined to expel, if possible, the wearers of the blood stained ermine, who have prostituted its holy places to the sustaining and perpetuating of slavery among men." As regards the District of Columbia, a place where Congress had exclusive jurisdiction, Clay if a member of Congress would vote to "liberate the slave and pay the master a fair equivalent". But sitting as a judge of the United States, being restricted to the bare question "what is the law?" he should declare every slave in the District free. For this conclusion he relied upon the provision of the Constitution, "No person shall be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law." Since slaves in the District of Columbia were solely under the jurisdiction of the national government, and since they could not be shown to have committed crimes, they must go free. "If this be not good law, and right reason, we are a slave and Madison may come in any place of exclusive national jurisdiction and take possession of us and ours, and there is no power in the American Constitution, or the Union of these states to save us."

Clay maintained that up to the time when the states carved out of the Louisiana Territory¹³⁴ were

¹³⁴ In 1845 these states were Louisiana, Arkansas, and Missouri.

acknowledged as sovereign by their admission to the Union, "every slave therein was free." As to Texas "if she comes in as a territory, her slaves are free, if she comes in as a sovereign, it is contrary to the United States Constitution - there is no law in the Union requiring her slaves escaping from 'service' to be returned into bondage - and we will put her out whenever we have the power."¹³⁵ Clay closed this editorial with the phrase, "The blood of '76 was shed in vain; the Americans are the slaves of slavery."

In the week prior to July 15, news had reached Lexington that Texas had accepted the terms of the joint resolution of Congress whereby Texas became a part of the United States as one of the sovereign states. In the July 15 issue Clay declared an "eternal and uncompromising war" against it.¹³⁶ There was a large party, embracing persons of all sections and all political faiths, who would oppose it forever, because it was the beginning of a ". . . course of unjust and God-defying

¹³⁵ When Mexico declared war, Cassius M. Clay volunteered as a soldier. He fought valiantly, was captured and distinguished himself for his bravery while a prisoner. When he returned to Lexington after his release, he was recognized by a public mass meeting when his old enemy, Thomas F. Marshall, forgot his enmity long enough to make a handsome speech of welcome, at the conclusion of which he presented Clay with a sword."

¹³⁶ See Note 135.

land piracy. . ." It trampled under foot the rights of man, inalienable by nature, and the great written law of the United States. Lastly, ". . . because it overturns the National compact and dissolves the Union. In the name of God and Liberty, we protest against any more base submission to the criminal usurpations of the slave power". Ironically he pointed out that while Mexico, "-the supreme power over Texas-" had declared all persons of all colors free, the United States, "with blood, fire, and death, violently subvert the decree".

In an editorial on July 15, Clay called upon all friends of freedom to stand together and not be divided by quarrels over particulars of emancipation". . . . We have . . . laid down ground broad enough for every statesman, moralist, and Christian in the state of Kentucky in favor of Freedom to stand upon; the time has come: the question is made: liberty or slavery?. . . ." He showed the workers what evils slavery had brought on them". . . What words can we use to arouse you to a sense of our deep and damning degradation! Men, we have one remaining, untried, omnipotent, power of freemen left - the ballot box . . . Come, if we are not worse than brutish beasts, let us but speak the word and slavery shall die!"

In another editorial he reviewed the history of

slavery in the United States and the power it had acquired in demanding and getting the admission of a slave state whenever a free state was ready for admission. Moving to the Texas controversy he denounced the stands taken by Van Buren, Cass, Clay, and Polk.¹³⁷ The joint resolution of Congress annexing Texas had "trampled the Constitution in the dust". The balance of power was thereby secured to the slave party. New markets were opened to the domestic slave trade, and "the American people have become the sole propagandist of slavery among men".

The anti-slavery movement was greatly embarrassed by a difference of opinion among its members as to the proper remedy for the slavery evil. Some advocated immediate, uncompensated abolition, while others urged emancipation with or without colonization.

On June 17 there was a third letter from "Incognito" pointing out the difference between Abolitionists and emancipationists, and urging gradual emancipation with compensation to owners. Beneath this was a letter to Clay from the Baltimore Emancipationists, commending Clay on his projecting the True American and urging him not to denounce Northern Abolitionists, as this would weaken the great cause.

¹³⁷ Polk openly advocated annexation. Van Buren, Henry Clay, and Cass temporized in their opposition to it.

An article copied from the July 25, 1829, issue of Niles Weekly Register praised the Memorial to the Virginia Convention of that year, which urged action whereby the slave population of the state might be "checked, reduced, and, if possible, ultimately done away [with]." The Memorial branded slavery "an evil greater than the aggregate of all other evils which beset us".

An article signed "Spirit of Liberty" related the bringing of four slaves by a Mississippian to Cincinnati, where he proceeded to emancipate them, educate them, and settle them on a farm. The article stated that, according to the newcomer from Mississippi, there was a strong and growing feeling there for emancipation. The article further reported the arrival of thirty emancipated slaves from South Carolina.

On July 8 was a third letter from "Libertas", opposing the colonization plan because it was impractical. Libertas was opposed to unconditional abolition and favored gradual emancipation. He thought gradual emancipation would be convenient in that the slaveholders would remove from the state and they could better be spared than "the thousands of better men who have abandoned her". Libertas would place the freed Negro in a position "below the sovereign and above that of slaves", politically. His social position could not be regulated by laws. "The same causes . . . which

now regulate society . . . will operate upon the Negro, while his color and the sense of his former situation will make his class distinct from all the others, and although he cannot aspire to an equal place in any of them, he may aspire to the respect and regard of all."

A letter to the True American from "Farlan", expressed amazement that in "our own native state, we see the men who were once soldiers" and who poured forth their blood freely in defense of Liberty, who now own slaves and "countenance and defend the institution of slavery, and sanction any outrage . . . upon those who hoist the standard of Liberty". Ministers "who speak proudly of the chivalrous armies of the Revolution, fighting against oppression", while at the same time, in some obscure corners of the churches, hundreds of slaves are "trying to find a friend in God, as they cannot in man". It was beyond Farlan's conception how a man "when he reflects on the sorrows and miseries of these blacks, could in its very midst say, 'it is right.'"

In an editorial on July 12 Clay ridiculed the fear of the pro-slavery faction that the emancipationists planned "turning the slaves loose among us". He

showed that they were already "loose" and that freedom would not incline them more to crime than slavery, and that the law would be as much of a restraint on them just the same in freedom as in slavery. He pointed to the pitiable condition of South Carolina where they had been thrown, by "the voice of one man in Massachusetts [Garrison]/, into complete consternation, greater than if 100,000 mail-clad men, with fire and sword, had landed on the shores of a just people". He showed that blacks increased more rapidly in slavery than in freedom, and concluded that "if we do not turn them "loose" they will go on increasing, till they get in a majority. When at last they will turn themselves loose . . . Man never has, and never will hold his fellow men in perpetual slavery".

The pro-slavery faction was constantly putting off the question of emancipation with the argument that the "time was not ripe". In answer to this Clay asked, "When did men as a body, ever in the history of mankind, lay down, voluntarily unjust power. . . ?" The time had never come, with them, and it never would. Again he appealed to the working classes "not [to] lie down and die like beasts . . . Let the cry be borne on every breeze that sweeps over our long down-trodden and slave-ridden state - the time has come! and Kentucky shall be free!"

On July 1, the entire front page was taken up with an Address to the People of the United States adopted by the Anti-Slavery Convention at Cincinnati. The Address began with the assertion that the convention was not a gathering of fanatics, as some "foolishly imagine, and other slanderously assert", bent on the overthrow of all government and all religion. "We are citizens of the United States . . . bound to our country by the most solemn obligations, filled with the most ardent desires for her prosperity and glory, and resolved . . . to carry on and perfect the great work of individual, social, and civil elevations which our fathers nobly begun." The address maintained that the spirit of the time of the Revolution was one of freedom and emancipation of slaves. It quoted an act of the first Continental Congress, agreeing not to engage in the slave trade. It cited the cession of western lands by Virginia with no strings as to slavery, and the subsequent Ordinance of 1787 by Congress to prevent slavery therein. It cited the preamble of the Constitution and the fact that no direct reference is made to slavery in the entire Constitution. Jefferson, Washington, Richard Henry Lee, Judge Tucker of Virginia, Luther Martin, and James Wilson were quoted

to show that the "Founding Fathers" intended that slavery should be eliminated in time. It drew up a bill of particulars against slavery and the encroachment of slave interests in the government. It closed with the peroration: "We are, therefore, resolutely, inflexibly, at all times, and under all circumstances, hostile to its longer continuation in our land. We believe that its removal can be effected peacefully, constitutionally without real injury to anyone, and with the greatest benefit to all."

The July 8 issue again devoted its entire front page space to the Address of the Anti-Slavery Convention at Cincinnati to the People of the United States. The address proposed to eliminate slavery by repealing all legislation and discontinuing all action, in favor of slavery at home and abroad, and by prohibiting the practice of slaveholding in all places of exclusive national jurisdiction, in the District of Columbia, in American vessels upon the seas, in forts, arsenals, and navy yards. It proposed forbidding the employment of slaves on public works. It urged the adoption of resolutions in Congress declaring that slaveholding in all states created out of national territories was unconstitutional, and recommending to the other

states the immediate adoption of measures for its extinction within their respective limits. It further urged the electing and appointing to public office only such men as openly avowed their principles, and "will honestly carry out our measures". "That this course will terminate, if steadily pursued, in the utter overthrow of slavery, at a not very distant date, none will doubt . . . Slaveholding is contrary to natural right and justice, . . . it can exist nowhere without the sanction and aid of positive legislation."

The Convention went on to score both major parties [Whig and Democrat] for by-passing slavery as the "paramount moral and political question of the day", and for making concessions to the slave interests. Because of the "hypocrisy" of the major parties, the Convention would "embrace the Liberty Party". It pointed out to the non-slaveholder of the slave states how they profited none from the institution of slavery but actually it diminished their population and hindered their prosperity. Since they were in the majority, Slavery's continuation depended upon them. It prevented their general education, for, "it is not the interest of the slaveholders that poor non-slaveholders should be educated". It pointed out that 1/17 of the white population of the South was unable

to read or write, while not 1/150 part of the same class in the free states were in the same condition. "It paralyzes your industry and enterprise . . . It degrades and dishonors labor. . . 'white Negroes' is the contemptuous term by which Robert Wickliffe. . . designates the free laborers of his state."

The concluding paragraph was a clarion call to action: "Carry . . . your principles to the ballot box . . . Your solemn vow that slavery must perish is registered in heaven . . . We are resolved to go forward, knowing that our cause is Just, and trusting in God."

The front page of the issue of July 22 was taken up with more doings of the Anti-Slavery Convention at Cincinnati. A series of resolutions adopted held that no party was truly a Democratic party which did not oppose slavery; that the party which did oppose slavery was the true Democratic party; and that they believed that the Union handed down by their forefathers contemplated the elimination of slavery. They resolved that they would support no candidate or party which did not favor emancipation, and that it was their purpose to divorce the National Government from slavery. They believed that the Liberty Party had never favored the candidates of either of the major parties. They urged a union of all "friends of freedom" for

political action. They advocated the nomination of candidates for President and Vice-President who would unite the greatest following among "friends of freedom". They held sympathy for those who were peacefully "aiding the enslaved to regain that freedom which . . . is inalienable".

On the same page a letter from Elihu Burritt, of Worcester, Massachusetts, to the Convention ornately praised the object of the Convention and deplored his inability to be present. He pitied Virginia, who, "the first to declare the inalienable rights of man . . . it was the first to become intoxicated with the spirit of domestic slavery". He scouted the accusation that the meeting was designed to promote the dissolution of the Union, and avers it is to "evolve the Union" that the meeting is called.

The front page of the July 29 issue was taken up with more letters from celebrated emancipationists to the Cincinnati Convention regretting their inability to attend the convention, but suggesting a course of action to be followed, and approving in general of the great ideals toward which the convention was working.

One from W. H. Seward urged "wide and enlightened moderation" because the slavery question had been so agitated that there was danger of disunion. He thought the annexation of Texas had increased the

difficulties of emancipation. The gains made by the Abolitionists had been "much diminished by the angry conflicts between them". Seward urged enfranchisement for the free Negroes in the free states. He closed with the admonition "to resist increasingly the admission of slave states, and demand the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia."

Horace Greeley's letter stated that while he approved in general the program of the Convention, he did not wish to pledge himself to any special and isolated reform in such a manner as to fetter or interfere with "my freedom and ability, to act decisively and effectively upon more general and immediately practical considerations of National interest and Human well being". He decried other features of slavery than its basic condition. He thought the condition of the free blacks in the free states was unbearable, suggesting that townships be set aside for them where they could thrive "untainted by a sense of African humiliation", and "not poisoned by the universal conviction of their inferiority".

Cassius Clay sent a letter reiterating his views on slavery and sympathizing with the Convention's work, but declined to attend because he was a Whig and would remain one "until some other [party] numbering more friends of liberty than we, shall give indication of

more speedy success".

In rather flamboyant fashion he expressed his determination, "while there is a banner flying, soiled and torn and trampled though it be, by an unthinking and infatuated multitude. . . there still rallying would I be found, with an unconquerable spirit; whether overwhelmed by numbers or borne down by superior force, ever ready to sacrifice all things but honor and the right".

In an editorial on August 1, entitled "Divorce in the South", Clay carried his anti-slavery arguments out of the political world and into the domestic. There were twice as many people in the free states as in the slave but divorces in the South greatly outnumbered those in the North. Clay attributed this to slavery and the fading of the beauty of southern wives because of idleness brought on by being waited on by slaves.¹³⁸ He advised women to:

Put away your slaves: nature never made provision for a slave, having decreed that work, health and happiness should be inseparably and inexorably united. If you want to drink go to the pump or to the spring and get it - if to bathe, prepare your own bath or plunge into the running stream, make your own beds - sweep your own rooms, and wash your own clothes, - throw away your corsets, and nature itself will form your bustles, - then you will have full chests, glossy hair, rosy complexions, smooth velvet skins, muscular, rounded limbs, graceful tourneures, elasticity of person, eyes of alternate fire and most melting languor, generous hearts, sweet tempers, good husbands, long lives

¹³⁸ Just an example of Clay's extraordinary ability to rub salt in open wounds.

of honeymoons, and - no divorces.

Contemplation of such domestic bliss and harmony must have struck a soft chord in Clay's hatred of Robert Wickliffe, for in a brief editorial entitled "Give the Devil His Due", he corrected a previous article in the True American censuring Wickliffe for having, for mercenary reasons, fought to save the life of his slave Moses, condemned to death for murder. Clay now, upon better information, credited Wickliffe with courage and good motives, in resisting popular opinion in behalf of his slave.

Clay entered the lists in defense of Edgar Needham in the issue of July 22 with an excoriating editorial against the pro-slavery party. He accused "Pharassical journalists" of using their influence to legalize the domestic slave trade which separated wife from husband, and child from both; of utterly neglecting the moral and intellectual discipline of children; of denying to slaves legal marriage; of giving power over females to the master. "Slavery cannot be defended - it must be abandoned. It is doomed. It must die."

In another editorial Clay repeated the observation previously made that slavery kept poor whites from prosperity and education, by making labor servile,

and by placing large farms between the populations so that schools were impractical. He invoked "Democrats, all over the Union . . . Whigs, North and South . . . Americans" to awaken, the time had come to take their ground on Liberty or Slavery. "Let us say with one loud and unanimous voice, slavery shall die!" He urged them not to rely on moral power, but strongly suggested that in the last analysis a resort to force might be necessary, and would be justified. "When society fails to protect us, we are authorized by the laws of God and nature to defend ourselves; based upon the right, the pistol and Bowie knife are to us as sacred as the gown and pulpit.

On July 8, he thought it was "too late to stop" emancipation, and that all the "intolerant and despotic can do is to waste their efforts in vain attempts to deceive or stop the masses". All the sophistry of its advocates could "neither extend nor prolong the reign of domestic slavery".

On June 3, there was a letter to the editor, signed "Libertas", urging, a "calm, thorough, and "dispassionate"

discussion of the subject of slavery. It maintained that slavery could not be perpetuated because of the natural law of progress in civilization. "Few will deny that slavery . . . is a moral and political evil of great magnitude - that it is an enemy to education, morality and religion - that it is an incubus upon the energies and enterprise of the people - that it degrades labor and cripples all the industrial and mechanical arts - that it promotes idleness and the love of ease, and is the very hotbed of licentiousness and vice."

The June 24 number carried a letter from "Incognito". This letter decried the inability of children of slaveholders to work for their own bodily needs, and the lack of knowledge among them of the "most ordinary business of life". Do away with slavery and the "kid-gloved gallants. . . called gentlemen" would be better known in their true characters. They would be shut out from society "as they should be" and their places taken by young men "of industry and virtue". Slavery "is the greatest enemy of the industrious mechanic class."

Many know this and have migrated".

Copied from the Chicago News in the issue of June 3 was a letter from "A Marylander", predicting that his state would soon be free. Also a letter from the Columbia [S. C.] Courier lamented the condition of the poor whites of South Carolina. Commenting on this the True American attributed their woeful state to slavery. It pointed out that there were 20,000 white illiterates in South Carolina, and that Charleston had lost 1000 population in the census of 1840 while other cities were doubling theirs.

In the issue of July 29 Clay launched into a diatribe on slavery:

It is enough to make the heart sick to see the once proud bird of Jove, the American Eagle, cowering in the very dust, beneath the cold, dark, and shiny folds of slavery; this serpent, which now rears its defiant head over eighteen million of men . . . No language can misrepresent slavery . . . The slaveholders and their sycophants, will find that the free white laborers of this land, composing four-fifths of the population, at the lowest estimate, are not slaves. Slavery is doomed - it must die! The first act of violence in its cause, will hasten its fate.

Immediately beside this Clay had an editorial condemning "abolition ultraism and pro-slavery ultraism" as alike dangerous and detestable. Both should meet the unqualified censure of a conservative public. The Abolitionists were "rabid, fanatical, and crazy."

If Clay could have maintained that attitude of censure toward both extremes of the slavery controversy, it is doubtful if he would not have served his cause better in the long run. Certainly, a larger following would have attached themselves to him so as to have prevented the later suppression by violence of his paper.

The next to last issue of the True American was published on August 12. There was a long editorial on "What is to Become of the Slaves in the United States after Emancipation". Clay opined that the slave would remain on the soil where he was placed. ". . . The colonization scheme has failed..." In forty years and after spending \$5,000,000, only 4,000 Negroes had been transported to Liberia. There were insufficient funds and tonnage to transport the 3,500,000 who remained and support them for three years thereafter. The natural increase was 75,000 annually, while 500 was the greatest number ever colonized in one year. In addition, the slave was reluctant to leave his old environment, regardless of the severity of his term as a captive: There was no danger of assimilation, for the Negro's color would always prevent his amalgamation into society as equal, without ". . . great exertion and willing sacrifice of feelings. . ." on the part of the Whites.

Clay suggested a two point political remedy. First, the Legislature should pass emancipation laws and provide for the education of Negroes. It would require work and sacrifice on the part of everyone to ". . . remove this worst malaria, this dreadful disease, this scathing pestilence, and this most dangerous of all enemies in our very bosom. . .". Second, the Legislature should give to the Negroes full political rights to hold office, to vote, to sit on juries, to give their testimony and make ". . . no distinction between them and ourselves. . .". The social parts of their rights could be left to the convention of society, which always takes care of itself. ". . . It is worse even than slavery to have a degraded, disfranchised class of freemen in any country."

Regarding the present low stature of the freedmen in society. Clay asked if it were human nature under their circumstances, to be proud, intelligent, honorable, and useful. ". . . We throw them into the very dirt, strip them in poverty and ignorance, take from them their rights, their pride, all motives to high acts and virtue, and wonder they do not rise! We deprive them of a country and wonder why they are not patriotic and useful. We knock off their chains but leave them still in prison! We take from them all character and look for virtue and worth in their deeds!" Our

national character, our best consciences, our duty, all weighed nothing in the scale of slavery, ". . . against the pride and selfishness of the master. . . ." The Constitution declared all men equal, with equal rights, but suffered slavery to exist, a free colored person to be denied all political rights and to be driven out of all the states. Denouncing the Constitution, Clay asked to be delivered from ". . . an instrument thus partial, thus unjust. . . ."

As individual remedies for the plight of the freedmen he called on all masters to work toward emancipation; offer slaves their liberty at half-price, talk calmly and join in deprecating the evil. He urged them to rid themselves of prejudices against the Negro. He asked them to be tolerant of Abolitionists, and look upon them as ". . . patriots, if too enthusiastic. . . ." He called on them to encourage religion among the slaves and also education, to spare the lash and all degrading punishments. The slaveholder could not hope to fence in his little kingdom and try to keep out all information. ". . . It will penetrate all disguises, and shine upon the dark night of slavery. . . ." The slave owner was surrounded by freedom on all sides, and the ". . . wolf looks calmly in upon the fold. . . ."

Such a picture of prospective emancipation and conditions thereafter was not one to attract a great following to the cause. This long and ably written editorial was doubtless another link in the chain of circumstances which was being forged against the continuance of the True American.

On July 29 there appeared three letters signed "Maria" and addressed to the "Ladies of Kentucky". Numbers one and two were devoted to an ethical discussion of the place of woman in society, and of her duties to her family and to society. The third letter swung into a denunciation of slavery.

On August 5, were letters number 4 and 5 from Maria to the Ladies of Kentucky. Maria thought that if slavery were inconsistent with Divine Law it must fall, for God's law "is destined to triumph over every human institution". Slavery conflicted with the preamble to the Declaration of Independence. "Can the slave be bought and sold as a chattel, all his domestic relations violated, all his inclinations disregarded, all his highest and noblest powers uncultivated, and yet be at liberty to pursue his own happiness."

In letter 5 Maria pointed out that "the cupidity of others may deprive" the slave mother of her offspring before her "maternal anguish" has been repaid by a single smile of affection. "Her babe. . . is not her child,

it is property." The laws of slavery did not accord to the slave mother even the right to defend her child against the "violence of a white person". Neither would her testimony "and that of a hundred of her color", convict such a person of the most revolting crime.

On August 12, were letters number six and seven from Maria to the ladies. Maria thought the "moral and physical" condition of the free people in a slave-holding state, hardly more enviable than that of the slave population. This because of the lack of industry. "This system [slavery] ruins the physical nature of one class, and murders the moral being of the other. . . . Slavery must be done away with and its victims raised to the rank of men and women." The reason bodily toil was regarded as degrading was that only slaves, who were degraded, were allowed to toil. The conditions of those who toil should be raised, so that "vice and degradation" are not characteristics of such people.

Maria also pleaded for consideration of slaves as humans, as "God's children", with a right to liberty and happiness. The slave is kept from virtue and "higher intellect" because there is no motive for his raising his vision of happiness beyond "indolence and self-indulgence".

As has been heretofore mentioned, the Baptist, and Methodist Churches had separated North and South on the issue of slavery. Many northern clerics were leaders in the anti-slavery movement, and their southern brothers felt called upon to defend their "peculiar institution" in the light of Scripture and Divine Revelation. Clay devoted much space in the True American to a series of letters between a northern and southern clergyman.

Page one on August 5, was completely taken up with correspondence between the Reverend Richard Fuller of Beaufort, South Carolina, and the Reverend Francis Wayland, of Providence, Rhode Island. Fuller's letter was a theological discussion of slavery. Fuller thought the slavery question "regards all kinds of property, all civilization, and life itself . . . Compared with slavery, all other topics which now shake and influence men's passions in these United States, are really trifling". The Old Testament did sanction slavery. Fuller pointed out that Paul had denounced every kind of sin imaginable, but "declined uttering a word" against slavery.

Wayland, in his answer, pled for a free discussion of the subject. He especially deplored the intolerance which "I believe to exist in the slave-holding states". He believed that at the time of the founding of the

nation, slavery was generally considered an evil, which all states at that time considered themselves duty bound to eliminate.

On August 12, the front page was occupied by two more letters from the Reverend Francis Wayland to the Reverend Richard Fuller, discussing whether or not slavery was morally wrong, and a violation of God's law. Wayland thought it was, because it kept slaves from knowing the word of God. It was wrong because it violated the relationship of husband and wife, of parent and child. Any society which "sanctions such a wrong" was also guilty. Time and conditions, however, change the degree of guilt of a crime. "It is much more difficult for a man at the present time to hold his fellow men in bondage, in ignorance, than it was twenty years since." The whole civilized world had, in recent years, become agitated on the question. Wayland suggested that where laws placed obstructions to emancipation, that the masters work for a change of law; or else work the slaves for their own benefit and not for the master's. Above all, the slave should be taught.

The last issue of the True American came out on August 19. It was an abbreviated number with the front page again taken up with two letters from Rev.

Francis Wayland to Rev. Richard Fuller. The back page had a number of ads, market reports, and an article on scientific agriculture. But pages two and three were simply blank. Probably this was because at this time and for a week before Clay had been confined to his bed with a serious illness. At any rate it is ironical that the last number of the controversial paper was the most innocuous of all.

Wayland continued his discussion of slavery as a scriptural institution. He admitted that slavery existed in the Old Testament, but believed this was because God had not yet seen fit to reveal his will on this subject. God had enlightened our race progressively and he had enlightened different portions in different degrees. He "holds men accountable only to the extent that he has enlightened them". Wayland pointed out the divergence of Mosaic law with ours as to cities of refuge, divorce, and polygamy. He showed the much more limited degree of Biblical slavery and its humaneness, as contrasted to ours. He thought "the Jewish law was made exclusively for that people and can be pleaded in justification by no other people whatever." Slavery was no more sanctioned than divorce and polygamy in Biblical law. All were tolerated and regulated.

In the fifth and last letter Wayland showed that

God revealed his will gradually, in order that one point might be learned before another was taken up. Wayland pointed out the evils of governmental tyranny in the time of the New Testament, but still Christ had abjured men to obey their government.

Such were the arguments, letters, news-accounts, and other propaganda, which Cassius M. Clay compiled and published in the brief twelve weeks in the summer of 1845. He unfolded to his readers the thoughts of the best minds of the anti-slavery movement, generally expressed with restraint, and always clothed in the garments of "constitutional" and "legal" procedure toward reform. While a column of each issue was devoted to the pro-slavery argument, and was written by one of that party; it was always a less reasoned argument that was advanced in this column. It was never so well presented as was the opposite side, nor was a recognized leader of national prominence in the slavery faction ever presented.

It must be remembered, however, that Clay was avowedly an emancipationist; had founded his paper to further that cause; and was not interested in presenting the arguments of the pro-slavery faction, in their most logical and attractive pattern. Quite the contrary, his aim was to discredit and defeat them.

Considering the bitterness of the battle raging between the pro-slavery and anti-slavery factions, it

is not difficult to see how the material we have already presented might have stirred the slavery party up to acts of violence, and to a suppression by mob-action of the True American. But Clay, not content with attacking slavery in its social, economic, and political aspects; now turned his invective on religion and, condemned in violent language the part played by the southern clergy in defending the "peculiar institution".

An article from the Cincinnati Herald on June 10 quoted an Abolitionist, Pierpont, as saying "Slavery corrupts religion and destroys the morality of the people", and was therefore, "the most formidable adversary to our government . . . Slavery has made this a nation of atheists". Pierpont concluded with an escoriation of the clergy for not taking a united, definite stand against slavery.

On June 17 there was an editorial from the Philadelphia North American in regard to the recent Methodist and Baptist schisms. "This division . . . shuts up the southern sections of these churches to the evils of slavery" and "conveys a moral rebuke which in the end must make itself felt . . . They cannot hold out against the light and influence of the age! They cannot long maintain a system against which the whole civilized world is moving. . . They must relinquish

slavery". The editorial favored a gradual emancipation over immediate abolition.

From the Western Christian Advocate came an account of a meeting of the members of the Methodist Church at Augusta, Kentucky, denouncing the action of the Louisville Convention of May 17, which separated the Methodist Church. The Augusta Church reprimanded and expelled their minister who had gone with the Southern faction of the Church.

On the second page of the issue of July 8 was a second letter from "Libertas". He pointed out that many sinned in supporting slavery, merely by doing nothing to rid themselves of the evil into which they had been born. "If slavery be wrong in itself, can we avoid a share in the guilt of its continuance by alleging that it has been entailed on us without our consent. . . whilst we calmly fold our arms, without making a single effort to remove or overcome these difficulties?" It ridiculed the advocates of slavery who pored through Scripture to prove that "oppression is no sin and tyranny no crime. . . that it is right to abolish the marriage relation". It concluded with the admonition: "Let us not . . . attempt to base our system of slavery on it [the Bible]". The Bible and slavery are as opposite as light and darkness."

A letter signed "Aquerius" discussed the theological

aspect of slavery further. It questioned whether or not Christ and the Apostle sanctioned slavery as averred by its proponents. After describing the barbarity of slave conditions in the time of Christ it said: "Now convince the world that this system or 'institution' was sanctioned, sustained, justified by the Apostles of our blessed Lord, who received their doctrine from his own lips. . . and the world will be driven into infidelity." Further, it said that "It is our opinion that no person can be recognized by heaven as a genuine Christian who sustains the relation of master for the sake of gain."

A squib beneath this letter stated that the Western Presbyterian and Congregational Convention at Detroit adopted a resolution reapproving the resolution of the Cleveland Convention of 1844 calling slavery a "great moral, personal, and political evil".

On June 22 Clay reported having read a pamphlet relating the experience of a Methodist minister who in 1833 was refused a license to preach because he advocated emancipation. Clay observed that "this great church . . . was in 1844 rent in twain by the same sentiments then [1833] denounced". He added that if the "Church South" did not see the handwriting on the wall "she is more blind than the reveller in

Babylon".

Clay could not even permit his agent, W. C. Bell, to pass to his eternal reward without using his demise to forge a weapon against slavery. Admitting that Bell was an atheist, Clay excused him because the "torpor and crimes" of so many professors of Christianity, especially with regard to slavery" . . . has made more infidels in this country than all the false philosophy and thoughtless smears of bad men put together, the cause of Christianity is betrayed in the house of its friends.

On July 29, Clay ironically discussed an article from the London Chronicle relating an interview with the Bey of Tunis regarding slavery wherein the Bey was reported to have said, "I have opened the way: I have abolished the sale of slaves: and I will not leave the work of emancipation whilst a slave remains in my dominions." Clay hoped the Bey "will be induced to send some missionaries to the Souther Churches in the United States."

Just beneath this was a reprint of a letter to the Richmond (Va.) Whig from "Citizen" protesting the presence of three Negro Sabbath Schools, where several hundred Negro children were congregated on Sundays. Citizen said he was ". . . clearly for allowing servants all religious privileges consistent with their

condition. . . According to the lights before them. . ."

But he was of the opinion that it was against the "policy of our State Institutions" to allow them to congregate "in the capacity of Sunday School Scholars, to receive instruction no matter of what kind. . .!"

He doubted very much if those engaged in promoting the schools, ". . . have counted the injury that may result to the community at large, by a misguided idea of Christian kindness or benevolence".

Clay had the forbearance to permit this letter to pass without editorial comment. His most scathing denunciation of the clergy came in an editorial on July 15. He classed them as worse than the slave traders.

There is a class of men who know that slavery cannot be justified . . . their tastes degrade them to seek illicit commerce with the Negro - yet they proclaim from the house tops most fastidious horror against amalgamations. . . they take up the Bible and affect to find that they are doing God's service in enslaving the 'children of Ham' - they are the foes of the freedom of the press - the liberty of speech - if they could muster 100 men to one they would lynch you - whenever it suits their purpose they are slave traders and for a good price have no objection to selling their own children . . . these men are simply villains. . . There is a class worse than this - they are the professed guardians of the morals of men - the representatives on earth of the Holy, sin-hating God - they shed crocodile tears over the miseries of men whilst they waste the body and soul, and gloat on the groans, the crushing affections, the deluded hopes, the despair, and the temporal and eternal damnation of immortal spirits. They are the robbers of the poor, would be seducers of women, betrayers of friends, the overweening contemnners of the humble sons of fortune, the sycophants

of power. . . nothing but abject and craven fear restrain them from . . . secret murder. . . these men justify slavery from the Bible, and prostitute to base uses of crime and war the sanctity of the pure and living God.

One would have to search the pages of Shakespeare to find invective more completely defaming than this. Here Clay switched his attack from the political and social and economic institutions of his compatriots, to a denunciation of their churches, through the clergy, the overwhelming majority of whom came within the scope of his curse. To make his remarks all inclusive he inserted a squib saying, "Does not the church say that slavery is no sin - and does not slavery in all the South legalize fornication?"

It was language and arguments of this type which doomed Clay's publication. No society could suffer such repeated exposure of the evils which it embraced, and survive. Either the society would have to undergo change and correction, or the exposing medium must be silenced. From now on the issue was joined and it was battle to the death.

Scattered through the various issues of the True American were miscellaneous articles, some true and some obviously make-believe, regarding conditions of slavery in other lands. On June 3 the Middlesex (Mass.) Standard reported that after ten years of the emancipation of 800,000 slaves in the British West Indies, peace and prosperity belied the evil forebodings

of the slavocrats in England and America.

On June 24 a letter to the editor, signed American, told of a speech by Sidi Mahomed Brahmin, of Tripoli, arguing against emancipation of Christian slaves as advocated by a sect called "Erika". The same arguments were employed by Brahmin which the pro-slavery forces in this country employed to discredit emancipation: i.e., loss of property to the owner, failure to produce crops on the land, and consequent depression; better living conditions for the Christian "dogs" in Islam where they were immune from wars, and where they could be taught the true religion, and thus save their souls.

Page two of the issue of June 24 was taken up with a lengthy Address of the Committee of the British and Foreign Anti-slavery Society to the Friends of the Slave in Slave Holding European Colonies. The address bewailed the domestic slave trade in America and the illegal foreign trade in America and Brazil. It also condemned the perpetuation of slavery in those countries where the foreign slave trade was outlawed. "The slave trade by which the present generation of slaves or their ancestors were reduced to slavery, is the immoral title deed on which the claim of the slaveholders. . . is founded." It cited mortality rates in slave countries to show deaths greater and births fewer than in free countries. It referred

to the improper care, nourishment, and education of the slave and to the excess amount of work required of him, as well as the cruel treatment which he received. The address closed with an appeal for complete freedom of the slave, as his right and pointed to the example of the Britain West Indies as proof that this could be safely done. It urged action by friends of the slave in the form of petitions to the government, use of the press, and public forums, and social intercourse, to work for emancipation.

On August 5 an article from the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Reporter, entitled, Christianity and Slavery Cannot Live and Prevail on the Same Soil, cited the example of Britain which attempted to improve the condition of its slaves by passing in 1823 several laws to promote their welfare. Three years later their condition was unimproved, as local sentiment was not in sympathy with such laws. The British people and Government thereafter settled on the conviction that "Slavery admitted of no essential mitigation or improvement, and that its only effective remedy was its extinction".

The True American did not neglect to center its attention on the evils of the slave trade.

Page four of the issue of June 3, was taken up

by a long article signed by A Virginian, reporting on the happy conditions in the British West Indies after ten years of enancipation. The article went on to show how the free states were outstripping the slave states in population, the value of agricultural products, the price of land, and general prosperity. Virginian attacked the domestic slave trade as the "worst feature of the system of slavery in this country". Ten to twenty thousand slaves were sold from Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware in the preceding year. The article disapproved of the colonization idea.

A reprint from the Washington Patriot on June 3 decried the evils of the slave trade, which from 1808 to 1840 had "stolen" seven and one half million souls from Africa and sold them mainly in the United States, Brazil and Cuba. "What a cloud of witnesses they will be at the bar of God, against the nation who participated in and connived at the awful wickedness of man stealing!"

Page four of the June 10 issue carried another letter from a Virginian. He traced the history of the persecution of the Jews and Moors of Spain and their eventual banishment, which injured both them and Spain. He compared this with the oppression of Negro slaves in America, with less extenuation in the latter case, since the slaves were brought here against their

will and had remained a "gentle and docile folk". Virginian urged freedom for the slaves without compelling colonization, pointing out the advantage to the country which would result from their liberty making them better workmen.

On July 29 a letter from an "Observer" related conditions in India where husband sold wives to pay debts. Observer sarcastically gave thanks that "no such barbarities obtain among us."

Several months after the fight with Brown, stark tragedy visited the house of Cassius Clay, and, as he thought, at the hands of the Negroes to whom he had dedicated all his energies. He had previously manumitted all his slaves, but he held in trust from the will of his father, a slave girl Emily, her mother, a brother, and a sister. On September 1, 1843, Clay's second son, Cassius, Jr., an infant of three or four years was taken ill, and died on September 20. Emily, the boy's nurse was strongly accused of poisoning the child, but was not brought to trial until two years after the death of the child. While she was awaiting trial in Megowan's slave jail in Lexington, Clay sold her mother, brother, and sister, into the Southern market. When Emily's trial came up, the jury could find no evidence sufficient to establish her guilt "beyond a reasonable doubt" and she was acquitted. Clay, still believing in her guilt, sold her to a slave trader who

carried her to the torrid cotton fields of Mississippi. For these actions, which were ascribed to "personal vengeance", Clay was severely criticized by the Abolitionists.

Clay had no compunctions about discussions of his own personal matters in his columns. On June 3 he copied an article from the Cincinnati Gazette in which a correspondent had charged Clay with inconsistency in professing to be an emancipationist while selling the slave girl, Emily's mother, brother, and sister after the alleged murder of his infant son by Emily. The Gazette defended Clay's action as magnanimous, as otherwise the slaves' lives would have been forfeited as abettors in the crime.¹³⁸

In the July 22 issue Clay published a letter he had received from ex-Governor Thomas Metcalf. Metcalf had risen from poverty to riches and prominence; had become a large slaveholder, and was smarting under the lash of Clay's pen. He called Clay a "monster of iniquity and a villain", the "foulest of calumniators", a "daggard" and a "dastard assassin", "an ass" and a "man of daring and consummate impudence". He chided Clay about the poisoning of Clay's child two years prior by a Negro slave and said that his [Metcalf's] slaves

¹³⁸ The trial of Emily had not yet been held and her coming acquittal unforeseen by the Gazette.

were better treated and were never put in jail as Clay's had been. "They do not poison my children; nor are they ever falsely charged with poisoning as an apology for their imprisonment and sale of their innocent relatives below. . . ." He said that Clay had "an Arnold and an Iscariot soul. . ." and was a "would-be traitor".

In his answer Clay passed good-naturedly over Metcalf's vitriolic name-calling. But the charges which the Governor brought against him in regard to his action toward his slaves were of a more serious nature and required a more particular investigation. ". . . If they should be found to be true then we are willing to be branded by the American people. . . 'with the damning infamy of a black-hearted villain'."

He cited evidence to refute Metcalf's accusations and stated that the mother of Emily abetted her in procuring an abortion of her own children ". . . for the purpose of enjoying uninterrupted their propensity for fornication, that source of sin and murder which the laws of Kentucky uphold and justify in slaves, and which Thomas Metcalf would make perpetual among us. . . ." Clay made the point that if she killed first her own children and then his, in cold blood". . . as will

be proven. . ."¹³⁹ it could all be attributable to "the resulting evils of slavery". Stating his sacrifices for his conviction, Clay continued:

We were born in wealth - in the cause of liberty we laid it down! We were as other men, fond of ease and pleasure, - but we rested never whilst the bonds of these millions of Blacks and Whites were unbroken.¹⁴⁰ We were ambitious, we would not willingly lie down in death like the beasts and be forgotten, - our prospects were flattering, - honor and place - the sparkling bowl was at our lips, but it was drugged with perpetual slavery - full of the tears and sighs and blood of our fellow men - and we dashed it to the earth! - we were straitened in the social circle - distrusted in our blood - spurned by our own relations - we were reviled on all hands - brow beat by the wise and great-avoided by the professed followers of Christ - a by-word among men - slandered far and near - plundered in our out-houses and in our dwelling by midnight robbers - circumscribed in our business - secretly and openly threatened with mobs - set on again and again by hired assassins - and at last found treason and poison and death in our own house! and yet we have kept the faith - were ready, if necessary to lay down our life for the destruction of slavery and the liberty of the downtrodden millions of our country. . .

For some strange reason the unpredictable editor devoted the entire space of the front page, and the first two columns of the second of the July 15 issue to a discussion of the laws of nations, particularly as they regarded the rights of ambassadors, envoys, and

¹³⁹ The case did not come to trial for several months yet, when it did Emily was acquitted.

¹⁴⁰ As has already been pointed out, Clay thought it was a debatable question whether the slaves or the poor white were most injured by the institution of slavery.

consuls. This was the only one of the twelve issues which had no material discussing slavery on the front page.

There was also an exchange of letters between Major Lewis Figg, of Bardstown, and Col. R. M. Johnson, establishing the fact that Figg and not Johnson, had killed Tecumseh at the battle of the Thames as popularly thought. There was also an article written by N. P. Willis for the New York Harbinger describing a "slumming" expedition to Five Points in New York City, where men, women and children, whites and blacks lived together in "unspeakable filth, vice, crime and congestion".

On the same page was copied an editorial from the Western Argus advocating a change in the state constitution which would not make the judiciary appointive for life. It urged rotation in office but made no mention of slavery.

A short article from the Kentucky Temperance Union attacked the law licensing whiskey distribution. It called this a "law to license murder, rapine, and theft."

Another letter to the New York Tribune from Cassius M. Clay had a pledge from Clay that he would "never again" offer or accept a challenge, or "in any manner . . . give Duelling my countenance or support".

In his July 15 issue Clay even had time to remark upon the filthy condition of the streets of Lexington as being a menace to the health of the citizenry:

Let any man pass along our streets after a shower of rain. . . and his olfactories will be greeted with 'the most villainous compound of unsavory smell that ever offended nostril'. Here is a dead cat, a starved, coop-diseased chicken, a mashed toad, and old shoes . . . a tainted beef-liver and soap-suds, and such a salmagundi from the kitchen tubs as would make a dog go fasting for a month. . . In vain have we escaped a mob if we are to fall thus.¹⁴¹ Neither gods nor men demand such a sacrifice - we shall scatter our types, burn our office, and be off!!

In the same issue an editorial on the "Administration of Criminal Laws in Kentucky", expressed the thought that under Kentucky's laws every man had free license to "bathe his hands daily in the blood of his dearest friends . . . and to commit the most horrible offences . . ." provided that in the day of his trial, he could muster enough influence "to suborn testimony, to pack a jury, or to procure a pardon. . . " Clay aligned himself as an "advocate of law as it exists".

For several weeks Clay had been seriously ill and confined to his bed by an attack of malaria. In response to rumors of his illness and death, Clay stated that he was ill, but not dead. He knew that many wished his death, but stated that ". . . the man

¹⁴¹ An indication that even in his lighter moments Clay was conscious that he was a marked man. Also possibly indicating that he felt that he had weathered the storm and had "escaped the mob".

does not live, whom we would if we could . . . cause one moment's pain. . . ." His death, however, would not end the struggle, as others would arise to take his place ". . . It is the weakness and disease of the state that has forced us [Clay] into our present position: and if we should perish, the same causes would raise up many more and abler than we to vindicate the same cause. . . . "

This calm and philosophical introduction was followed by perhaps the most provocative essay which Clay had yet written.

He had hoped to see this continent free.

". . . But we are told the enunciation of the great and soul stirring principles of Revolutionary patriots was a lie - as a dog returns to his vomit we are to go back to the foul and cast out rags of European tyranny to hide our nakedness; slavery, the most unmitigated, the lowest, basest that the world has seen, is to be substituted forever for our better, more glorious, holier aspirations - the Constitution is torn and trampled underfoot, justice and good faith in a nation are divided, brute force is substituted in the place of high moral tone: all the great principles of national liberty which we inherited from our British ancestry are yielded up - and we are left without God or hope in the world. . . ."

This was fighting language to the inheritors of the slave system, whose ancestors had fought, and bled, and died to establish this "more perfect union" as a refuge from "European tyranny". But Clay went further:

When the great hearted of our land weep, and the man of reflection maddens in the contemplation of our national apostasy: there are men pursuing

gain and pleasure, who smile with contempt and indifference at their appeals. But remember, you who dwell in marble palaces - that there are strong arms and fiery hearts and iron pikes in the streets, and panes of glass only between them and the silver plate on the board, and the smooth skinned woman on the ottoman. Where you have mocked at virtue, denied the agency of God in the affairs of man, and made rapine your horrid faith: tremble! for the day of retribution is at hand - and the masses will be avenged.

Such was the attack which Clay made upon the slave power. But he had overshot his mark. His attack was too violent and the remedies which he proposed for the evils of the slave system were too revolutionary to be accepted by any considerable following: Opinion, in the three months of the issue of the True American, had been formulating - but it was solidifying against him and his program. Events were to move quickly now to a climax.

V. The Breaking Up of The True American

With each succeeding issue of the True American the advocates of slavery became more determined that it be suppressed. On August 14, two days after the publication of the editorial about "the smooth skinned woman on the ottoman"¹⁴² a committee of infuriated citizens met at the court house to formulate their plans. Clay's great enemy, Thomas F. Marshall, acted as chairman, and when Clay, who had arisen from his sick bed, demanded a hearing he was refused. The meeting resolved that Clay cease the publication of his paper. Marshall said that Clay had "assassinated the peace and good order of the community".

After the meeting adjourned, a committee waited on Clay, who had retired to his sick bed, and delivered to him an ultimatum that he "discontinue the publication of the . . . True American, as its further continuance. . . is dangerous to the peace of our community, and to the safety of our homes and families". They explained that they did not offer a threat, but were concerned about his personal safety unless he cease his publication. After listening to the committee, Clay denounced them in his usual style. He called them "traitors to the laws and the constitution". Their advice as to his personal safety ". . . was worthy of the source whence

¹⁴²

See page 139.

it emanated, and meets with the same contempt from me which the purpose of your mission excites. Go tell your secret conclave of cowardly assassins that C. M. Clay knows his rights and how to defend them".¹⁴³

This reply further incensed the pro-slavery crowd, and by nightfall, news of it had spread all over town. On Saturday, August 16, handbills were issued to the "People of Lexington and Fayette County" announcing a mass meeting to be held on the following Monday to take steps toward the suppression of the "filthy abolition" paper. The bills were carried to adjoining counties and distributed there.

Foreseeing that the temper of the citizens was bent on the destruction of his publication, Clay made preparation for a last desperate stand. Gathering about him a half-dozen trusted friends, he fitted the rifles and shotguns in his "arsenal" with new percussion caps. The two brass cannons were loaded afresh and sighted so that the deadly canister would rake the entrance to his printing office.

Knowing that Clay had a legal right to, and would defend his office against invasion, his adversaries devised a plan to seize his printing plant under process of law. On the early morning of August 18, the day of

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Memoirs, 342.

the mass meeting, Judge Trotter of the police court, quietly and without notice to Clay or opportunity for him to be heard, issued an injunction against The True American office and all its appurtenances. Armed with the writ of seizure, the city marshal then called on Clay and demanded the keys. Clay surrendered them.¹⁴⁴

At eleven o'clock a crowd of more than a thousand men assembled in the courthouse yard. Waller Bullock was chosen Chairman, and Thomas Marshall addressed them. Recounting the grievances of the community against the True American, Marshall said Clay might rest assured that the good citizens would not be deterred by ". . . one nor 10,000 such men as he . . . He cannot bully his countrymen. A Kentuckian himself, he should have known Kentuckians better. . . We are armed and resolved - if resistance be attempted, the consequence be on his head. For our vindication . . . we appeal to Kentucky and to the world."¹⁴⁵

At the conclusion of his speech, Marshall offered the following resolutions which were unanimously adopted:

Be it resolved by the Assembly:

First: That no Abolition press ought to be tolerated in Kentucky, and none shall be in this

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 343.

¹⁴⁵ Lexington Observer and Reporter, August 23, 1845.

city or its vicinity.

Second: That if the office of The True American be surrendered peaceably, no injury shall be done to the building or other property. The presses and printing apparatus shall be carefully packed up and sent out of the state, subject then to C. M. Clay's order.

Third: That if resistance be offered, we will force the office at all hazards and destroy the nuisance.

Fourth: That if an attempt be made to revive the paper here, we will assemble.

Fifth: That we hope C. M. Clay will be advised. For by our regard to our wives, our children, our honor, wear what name he may, be connected with whom he may, whatever arm, or party here or elsewhere may sustain him, he shall not publish an abolition paper here, and this we affirm at the risk, be it of his blood or our own, or both, or of all he may bring, of bond or free, to aid his murderous hand.

Sixth: That the chairman, be and he is hereby, authorized to appoint a committee of sixty of our body who shall be authorized to repair to the office of The True American, take possession of the press and printing apparatus, pack up the same, and place it at the railroad office for transportation and report forthwith to this body.¹⁴⁶

The chairman then appointed sixty men from the crowd,¹⁴⁷ who proceeded to the office of The True American, where they found the city marshal. After a "formal protest", he surrendered the keys to Clay's printing office.

The Committee was quiet and orderly in going about its work. By nightfall the rooms on the second floor of the building were dismantled and the press and

¹⁴⁶ The Committee of Sixty was headed by James B. Clay, son of Henry Clay and distant kinsman of Cassius M. Clay.

¹⁴⁷ Connolly and Coulter, Op. Cit., 312, Note 38.

apparatus boxed up and sent to the freight depot.

Late that night the equipment was shipped to Cincinnati, consigned to Messrs. Jannary and Taylor.

Thus ended the attempt to publish an Abolition paper in Lexington, Kentucky. Shortly after this event, Clay went off to the Mexican War as a volunteer, thinking to improve his political position by a military record. In his absence he turned the affairs of The True American over to John Vaughan, a newcomer to Lexington from South Carolina, and to Brutus Clay, his brother. The paper was set up in Cincinnati and ran for several months, but the subscription list fell off and it was deemed advisable to discontinue it. On June 19, 1847, Vaughan, with the consent of Clay, took the materials, together with the list of subscribers to Louisville, where with F. Crosley, he published The Examiner, an emancipation paper. This publication was continued until the latter part of 1849, and was highly regarded by the press of Louisville and of the state, even pro-slavery papers.¹⁴⁸

The more prominent members of the committee of sixty went through the form of a trial in Judge Trotter's court on September 18, 1845, where ". . . after full argument, the jury, without hesitating,

¹⁴⁸

Martin, Asa E., Op. Cit., 118

gave a verdict of not guilty".

After his return from the Mexican War, Clay brought suit against the "committee" for damages done to his printing press, and, upon change of venue to Jessamine County, was allowed damages of \$2,500.¹⁴⁹

We can perhaps best evaluate the influence which Cassius M. Clay had on the anti-slavery movement in Kentucky by an examination of the reaction in the press to the violent suppression of The True American.

George D. Prentice, the outstanding journalist in Kentucky, and ever a defender of the freedom of the press, was critical of the actions of the Committee of Sixty. He believed that it was the work of a small headstrong group of men who were determined to retain the power of dominating the policies of Kentucky. Prentice said that Clay had acted with moderation.¹⁵⁰

Newspaper editors of the upper South, as a rule, however, watched the suppression of The True American, by mob action with decided approval. The Richmond Whig said: "We feel no sympathy for Mr. Clay, a member of that family of fanatics, who, pernicious ever to society and its peace, are more especially pernicious to the cause which they undertake to promote."¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ Clark, Thomas D., Op. Cit., 283.

¹⁵⁰ Martin, Asa E., Op. Cit., 188.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

The Alexandria Gazette said ". . . The incendiary article wantonly published in the midst of a community, situated as the people are in Kentucky, could not with safety to themselves be tolerated. They abated the nuisance as peaceably as they could. . . ."152

The Richmond Enquirer said ". . . We feel that our existence could not be free from danger whilst a fiery fanatic like C. M. Clay was allowed to continue an Abolition paper and hurl his incendiary missiles into every corner of the South. . . ."153

The Lexington Observer and Reporter, which on June 7 had raised its voice against any threat of violence to the newly created True American,¹⁵⁴ took the view that ". . . the action of the people . . ." was dictated by what was demanded by the public welfare and safety of the community. It congratulated the community upon ". . . the rare spectacle of an innumerable body of citizens, meeting as a matter of course with highly excited feelings, yet so far subduing and moderating their spirit as to accomplish their purpose without the slightest damage to property or the effusion of a drop of blood".¹⁵⁵ The Observer thought men might write

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Lexington Observer and Reporter, June 7, 1845.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., August 20, 1845.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

books to prove the action of the Committee a "lawless procedure", and in utter violation of the Constitution and laws by which "our property and rights are protected". But it would avail them nothing. ". . . There may be a state of things in which the Constitution and laws are totally inadequate to the public protection from dire calamities, and in that event popular action (though usually to be deprecated) must be excused".¹⁵⁶

The historian Kerr, in discussing the suppression of The True American, concludes: ". . . This was not the action of a mob; it was the bursting determination as irresistible as any human passion aroused by the exasperation of outraged feelings, but withal orderly and measured".¹⁵⁷

The suppression of The True American revealed the great power of the pro-slavery faction in agitating a Southern community into acts of violence. In the final act the driving out of the obnoxious paper was accomplished with the approval of the great body of citizens.¹⁵⁸ Yet this unanimity of feeling was carefully worked up by a clique of interested persons, bitter political and personal enemies of Cassius M. Clay. Clay himself did not believe his opponents were sincere in maintaining that his paper would incite

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Connolly and Coulter, Op. Cit., 342.

¹⁵⁸ Eaton, Clement, Op. Cit., 189.

the slaves to revolt. He said: ". . . I regard the idea of insurrection in Kentucky, where there are about six whites to one black, as ridiculous and only used by slaveholders as a bugaboo, to maintain the ascendancy of their power in the state".¹⁵⁹

The failure of Clay to persuade the people of Kentucky to tolerate an Abolition press revealed, first the irresistible power of wealth and the vested interests in the Old South, and, secondly, the unreasonable fear of servile insurrection. The minority benefitted by slavery made it dangerous for a man to express independent views on slavery in a public speech or newspaper. The common people could be thrown into a panic by the term "abolitionist". Thus, on the ground of securing the public safety, freedom of the press was denied to the mild opponent of slavery who was often purposely confused with the dangerous fanatic.¹⁶⁰

Although Clay was constantly dubbed "abolitionist" by his adversaries, it is apparent from his lucid and vigorous protestations that he stood only for "emancipation, gradual, and constitutional". In his enthusiasm, and roused by the brutalities he saw in the "peculiar institution", he sometimes permitted himself

¹⁵⁹ True American, June 10, 1845.

¹⁶⁰ Eaton, Clement, Op. Cit., 192.

the luxury of language, which considered by itself, and disconnected from the main theme of his argument, could be and was considered inflammatory.

Dr. Thomas D. Clark says that slavery in Kentucky ". . . never had a more serious threat than from this paper. Coming as it did from the heart of one of Kentucky's largest slaveholding counties, and edited by a native son, it was from its beginning a most potent factor in the formation of public opinion".¹⁶¹

¹⁶¹ Clark, T. D., History of Kentucky, 350-351.

VI. Conclusion

The climax in the emancipationist movement came in 1849. There had long been a desire for a convention to revise the Constitution. Numerous reforms were wanted, but the convention had been retarded by the fear of tampering with slavery. In spite of this, success was had and the convention was called to meet in Frankfort in October, 1849. The expression of the state through the legislature had been strong and steady in favor of slavery. In 1841 the ultra-conservative slave leadership sought to amend the law of 1833 prohibiting the importation of slaves into the state for sale. They had been defeated, but their aggressive power was growing.

In his message to the legislature on December 30, 1848, Governor Crittenden reminded the legislators that in the preceding two elections the people had voted for a constitutional convention and that it was the duty of the legislature to call such a convention. He cautioned them, however, that, "Devotion to the Union is the common sentiment of her [Kentucky's] people . . . The dissolution of the Union can never be regarded - ought never be regarded - as a remedy, but as the consummation of the greatest evil that can befall us".¹⁶²

The election of the Constitutional Convention

¹⁶² Coleman, Mrs. Chapman, Op. Cit., 330.

offered the opportunity for the greatest conflict between the emancipationists and the pro-slavery adherents, whose decision would be immutable and final. The former especially, began early to prepare for the fight to capture as many of the delegates to the convention as possible. They had some strong leaders, who were powers in the state. Henry Clay had never swerved from his earliest principles on slavery, gradual emancipation with colonization and he had never ceased to fight for them.¹⁶³

In organizing for the campaign the emancipationists called a convention to meet in Frankfort on April 25 to formulate a policy. In order to prevent division the convention adopted no direct plan of emancipation, but reasserted the old principle of gradual emancipation to operate only on those born after the system should be set up, and to be connected with colonization. It was resolved that only those candidates should be voted for who were against the further importation of slaves into the state, and for the right of the people incorporated in the new constitution, to institute a system of gradual emancipation.¹⁶⁴

As the campaign became heated the strong conservatives of both the Whig and Democratic parties became

¹⁶³ Connally and Coulter, Op. Cit., 813-814.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 814.

frightened and in some instances united on their candidates against the emancipationists. The Democrats had a more consistent record against emancipation than the Whigs, and as a result the Union candidate was generally a Democrat. The two parties in Fayette County united and divided the offices between themselves.¹⁶⁵

On June 15, 1849, there occurred another affray at Foxtown, on the Lexington-Richmond turnpike in Madison County, which was to further widen the breach between the contending factions, and to make of Cassius Clay even a more hated and dreaded rival of the slavery faction. The campaign for election to the Constitutional Convention of 1849 was on and Squire Turner, the pro-slavery candidate from Madison was addressing a political gathering. Clay had been advised by his friends, and warned by his enemies not to attend the meeting, but nevertheless, true to his character, he was there. Turner poured forth a scurrilous attack upon Clay, who when Turner had finished, mounted the speaker's stand and in his characteristic defiant manner, began paying Turner back in kind. He was soon interrupted by Cyrus Turner, Squire's eldest son, who rushed toward the

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 814-816.

speaker, shouting: "You're a damned liar!"¹⁶⁶

Clay jumped off the stand to meet him and was dealt a blow in the face by Turner. Clay found himself surrounded by the friends of Turner, and, as he attempted to draw his trusty bowie knife, he was struck on the head with a club and the knife jerked from his hand. Then Thomas Turner, brother of Cyrus, tried to shoot Clay with a revolver, but it failed to fire. Clay had been stabbed from behind, and in attempting to keep from being stabbed, seized the open blade of the knife with his naked hand, and although it nearly severed several of his fingers, he wrenched it from the hand of his adversary. "Blinded with fury and pain, Clay with a superhuman effort, shook off those who held him and singling out Cyrus Turner, plunged the knife in his abdomen to the hilt."¹⁶⁷ Turner died within a few hours and Clay was carried away so seriously wounded that he was not expected to live, but did.

The election turned out to be a complete disaster for the emancipationists. Robert J. Breckinridge, the most powerful candidate of this group was defeated, and not a single out-and-out emancipationist candidate was elected. This was a considerable surprise. A vast

¹⁶⁶ Coleman, Winston, Op. Cit., 315.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 316.

majority of the voters held no slaves whatever, but other elements than this entered the situation. Among those who owned no slaves, many opposed emancipation because the influence of such radicals as C. M. Clay was disastrous. In addition, those opposed to slavery were far from being of the same mind in the degree of their opposition.¹⁶⁸

The power which the people possessed to deal with slavery had been thrown away in the election of the convention; slavery leadership was in control, and slavery would not only be protected in the new constitution, but further entrenched.

The Democrats won a majority of the delegates and organized the convention with James Guthrie, of Louisville, as president. The convention had many able men in it and in many ways was a remarkable body. Forty-two of the delegates were lawyers, thirty-nine were farmers, nine were doctors, two were mechanics, and the other eight had miscellaneous economic or professional classifications.¹⁶⁹

Deliberations began on October 1, and continued until December 21. Although no emancipationists had been elected to the convention as such, there were members who stood for some system of gradual

¹⁶⁸ Connally and Coulter, Op. Cit., 116.

¹⁶⁹ Journal of the Constitutional Convention, of 1849, 647.

emancipation and fought for it at almost every step. In fact, the question of slavery protruded itself into almost every question.¹⁷⁰

William Mitchell of Oldham County compared the men of the North and South to the advantage of the latter and asserted that this superiority was due to the institution of slavery in the South. He also asserted that slavery was a positive benefit to the African, since it removed him from barbarism and exposed him to civilization and Christianity.¹⁷¹

Mr. Dixon, of Hopkins County, offered a resolution denying to the convention the power to emancipate slaves. This precipitated a storm of debate.¹⁷² Mr. Talbott, of Boyle County, held that slavery was neither a sin nor a moral evil, nor was it detrimental to the best interests of the state.¹⁷³ He produced Scriptural evidence to prove that slavery was just and right from a religious point of view. William C. Bullitt, of Jefferson County, agreed that slavery was neither a moral nor a social evil, but on

¹⁷⁰ Connally and Coulter, Op. Cit., 817.

¹⁷¹ Journal of the Constitutional Convention of 1849, 141-143.

¹⁷² Ibid., 112.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 84.

the contrary was a positive advantage to the white population, and no injury to the black.¹⁷⁴ Squire Turner, of Madison County, maintained the inviolability of slave property, but was opposed to the further importation of slaves into the state.¹⁷⁵ He thought that if a new commonwealth were being formed where no slavery existed, it would be better to get along without it, but that under the circumstances it was a benefit to both races.

Mr. Clarke, of Simpson County, opposed colonization as unjust to the Negro, in that it removed him from association with a superior race, and reverted him to barbarism.¹⁷⁶

The question arose as to whether slaves were to be counted as three-fifths of a free person in apportioning representatives, and also as to whether or not freed Negroes were to be counted at all.¹⁷⁷

Slavery was completely intrenched in the new constitution. The wording of the old provision was left

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 85.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 81.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 488.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 594.

almost unchanged, and new safeguards were added. To forever end the menace of a free Negro population, it was provided that no slave might be emancipated unless means were provided for his removal from the state. It was further provided that no free Negro might come into the state. To place the power far from the multitude to change these provisions, an almost impossible method of amendment was adopted.¹⁷⁸

The new constitution was referred to a popular vote in May, 1850, and a surprisingly strong opposition immediately sprang up against its adoption. But the opposition was doomed to failure. In a total vote of 91,955, the new constitution was ratified by a vote of 51,351 to 40,604.¹⁷⁹

In 1849 the lower house of the Legislature declared unanimously that it was opposed to abolition or emancipation in any form except as provided for by the constitution and laws of the state. A few weeks later the law of 1833 was repealed, and all of the progress toward the final extinction of slavery made since 1815 was now gone.¹⁸⁰

The emancipationists were left stunned for a time.

¹⁷⁸ Connally and Coulter, 817.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 837-838.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 813.

They were in doubt as to what course of action to pursue at first, but soon they determined to forget their disastrous defeat and work with redoubled vigor.

In 1851 Clay canvassed the state as candidate for the governorship of Kentucky. Meeting with bitter opposition everywhere he spoke, Clay, with his brace of pistols and bowie knife, sometimes concealed in his belt, sometimes laid on the table before him as he spoke, loudly voiced his anti-slavery convictions. He was overwhelmingly defeated.¹⁸¹

Undaunted by his defeat in 1851, Cassius M. Clay continued in the ranks of the emancipationists. He joined the Republican Party and campaigned for Lincoln in 1860. He was mentioned by some as a candidate for the vice-Presidency, but was passed over for a less radical leader. After the election of Lincoln, Clay was chosen ambassador to Russia, and accepted. He served in St. Petersburg until 1868, when, unable to get along with Secretary Seward, he resigned.¹⁸²

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Martin, Asa E., Op. Cit., 124.

At Lawrenceburg, some twenty miles from Lexington, Clay was scheduled to speak in behalf of emancipation. Posters announced that no anti-slavery speech would be tolerated under penalty of death. Despite this Clay appeared, addressed a packed court room, and departed unmolested.

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Memoirs, 345-347.

His wife and children remained in Russia with him only a short time, returning to Kentucky and settling on his estate in Madison County. When Clay returned to Kentucky in 1868, the bonds of union between him and his wife which had long been strained, were severed. They were separated almost at once and divorce proceedings begun. These dragged on for years and the final decree was not handed down until 1878.¹⁸³

Clay lived at White Hall with a young adopted son, whom he had brought back from Russia. In 1893, at the age of eighty-three, he married the eighteen year old daughter of one of his tenants, but she left him after only a few months of married life. His last years were lonely but were enlivened from time to time by various controversies in which he became involved. One of these was with Pope Leo XIII. Unable to settle his difficulties with the Pope as he would have done in earlier years, he informed the world that he would best Leo by outliving him. As the months dragged on it became a wagering matter in Kentucky as to which of the old men would pass away first. But Clay was as good as his word and outlasted the pontiff by two days. He died on July 22, 1903.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸³ Ibid., 363-364.

¹⁸⁴ Dictionary of American Biography IV., 169.

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